



QUALITY, ELEGANCE AND FRESHNESS IN A CHALLENGING YEAR

2021 Harvest Report

The 2021 harvest in Portugal was of good quality and higher in volume than 2020, as a result of the mild year, despite some instability, particularly at harvest time. Sogrape is the leading wine company in Portugal, with a presence in the main wine regions of Douro/Porto, Alentejo, Vinhos Verdes, Dão, Bairrada and in Bucelas (Lisboa). The results are certainly positive, in terms of quality and quantity, reflecting the heterogeneity of the country, and good development of the wines is anticipated.

Portugal is one of the main European wine producers whose production increased in 2021, a year marked by lower volumes worldwide. The OIV — International Organisation of Vine and Wine — forecast that Portugal could expect a 1% increase in 2021 compared with 2020, with a volume of 6.5 million hectolitres. <https://www.oiv.int/js/lib/pdfjs/web/viewer.html?file=/public/medias/8561/en-oiv-press-release.pdf>

Sogrape Highlights

- A year of overall good quality with higher production than 2020
- Very good white wines, especially from Bucelas
- Lower yields in the Vinhos Verdes region
- High quality with normal yields in the Dão
- Very high quality and greater volumes in the Alentejo
- Douro and Porto wines of very good quality

2020–2021 in Portugal

The IPMA, Instituto Português do Mar e Atmosfera, the Portuguese meteorological authority classed the 2020–2021 **winter** as warm, with normal rainfall. The very cold and dry weather in late December and January gave way to rain and higher than normal temperatures in February. The **spring** was very warm and very dry compared to normal, but there were significant variations in some regions that affected budbreak and development of the vines. In several places, particularly in the north and in the coastal areas on the Atlantic, it was cold and rainy during flowering. May was cooler than usual. There was a drought in the south, and in the north-east there were localised extreme events. **Summer** was considered normal and dry, but the situation across the country varied greatly. In June, there was heavy rain and hail in the central and northern interior, and in August there was a heat wave in the south. The minimum temperatures were always below average and July was cooler than normal. The mild conditions favoured good maturations, slower in cooler zones, creating high expectations. Climatic instability in September marked the final phase of the cycle and the **harvests**.

Portugal is small in size, but the wide diversity of its regions was very evident in 2021. In locations where maturation occurred early or where the harvest period was dry, harvesting was carried out calmly and gave good results. At sites where maturation was delayed by unstable weather and rainfall, harvests presented greater challenges in the vineyard and the winery, and required careful management of ripening and picking times. The warm and dry weather of October ("pity it was late") allowed the vine to finish the cycle well and gain more energy for 2022. All in all, the year produced a positive result.

- **Sogrape in the Douro**

Luís Sottomayor, head oenologist for Sogrape's Douro and Port wines, said that the 2021 harvest was challenging but gave rise to **"very aromatic, fresh and elegant wines, with good quality and quantity"**. Sogrape's production increased 26% compared to 2020, higher than the region's average of around 20%.



In the Douro, the year was classified as "normal and dry" based on the average for the region. The rainy winter created good water reserves in the soil, and the mild spring made a healthy, although heterogeneous, budbreak possible. The vines had great vegetative vigour, making it necessary to control excessive growth and weeds. Phytosanitary pressure was less prevalent than in some years, but the recurrence of cloudy days, with warmer temperatures and high humidity brought with it some powdery mildew. Despite this, there were conditions and "time for extra care beyond the essentials", said José Manso, head of Sogrape's viticulture in the region. The year was "hard work" on the company's more than 600 ha of vineyards, but the hard work was rewarded by more resistant vines and more uniform yields. Throughout the cycle, some extreme weather events (thunderstorms, heavy rains, hail the size of golf balls) caused serious but localised damage from mudslides and landslides, and outright crop destruction. In this game of Russian roulette, the company's various estates were spared. The incredible diversity of conditions on the estates and in the region was reflected in the different phenological stages of the vines, with considerable heterogeneity depending on grape variety and location. In general, the mild summer and cool nights promoted good and very balanced maturations. Expectations were high, with a harvest of high quality and normal quantity based on the average for the region anticipated.

Sogrape's harvest was long, starting on 23 August with the Muscat grapes from Quinta do Seixo (harvested 2.5 weeks later than in 2020) and finishing on the estates further east at the end of October.

"The grapes, both white and red, had an extraordinary flavour", said Luís Sottomayor. At the beginning, his thought was "to hold back, and continue harvesting calmly, because the grapes were in excellent health, with freshness, acidity and balance". Enthusiastic, he recalled what he felt when he tasted some Tinta Francisca and Touriga Fêmea berries at Quinta do Seixo (Pinhão) in August, "It was the first time — it had never happened to me before — they had an extraordinary aroma and aromatic intensity...", and his eyes revealed much more than words can say. "The harvest started very well and calmly", at the pace of maturation. The first rains in early September forced the harvest to move at an even slower pace to allow the grapes to recover. In the following weeks, the weather pattern repeated, alternating between good weather and rain, causing some worry.



“There are quality wines throughout the region, from grapes harvested both before and after the rains”, he said.

As for the whites, there are “good wines, with good fruit and freshness”, from the plateaux of Vila Real (Baixo Corgo) to the vineyards of the Meda and Quinta do Sairrão areas (São João Pesqueira, Cima Corgo). In higher and cooler places, especially above an elevation of 500–600 metres, it was necessary to wait for the fruit to reach the right point before harvesting. Very well adapted to these locations, grape varieties such as Rabigato, with a hard skin and small berries, coped well with the extra time, giving excellent must. The more mature grapes with thinner skin, especially in areas at low elevation, were at greater risk with each successive rainfall and needed harvesting quickly. Manual harvesting is always a challenge in the region. It is a time-consuming and labour-intensive job, and getting sufficient labour becomes harder with each passing year.

Luís also mentioned the **“very interesting quality reds, particularly in the Douro Superior”**.

Quinta da Leda (Foz Coa) had a long harvest, almost twice as long as normal, but it was worth it. The estate’s own grapes were harvested between 2 September and 14 October, but the winery continued to receive grapes from selected winegrowers in the region after that. Planted exclusively to red varieties in a wide variety of locations, Quinta da Leda’s 160 ha of vineyards experienced a calm maturation with cool nights. September was atypical, and this subregion was colder and rainier than usual. On the estate, a few days of the month were above 30–32°C, and one-quarter of the annual rainfall fell during the harvest period — of the annual 470 mm, some 100 mm fell in September alone. As a result of the mild cycle and care in the vineyard, the grapes were in great condition, very fresh and full of flavour. Harvest started slowly, with all the time in the world to choose the varieties and plots to harvest at the best possible time. The first to be picked were Tinta Roriz and Tinta Barroca, and less common varieties such as Tinta Amarela and Bastardo. The picking pace increased after the second rains (13 and 25 September), as and when the grapes were ready. Varieties such as Touriga Nacional held out well and produced high-quality wines, both before and after the rains.

In-depth knowledge of grape varieties and locations, good management of harvest times and some faith (“with the help of Saint Peter”) paid off. The extreme diversity of conditions in the Douro revealed its richness once again, a year very different from the one before. The milder 2021 highlighted lower and warmer areas, in contrast to the dry, scorching 2020.

Unsurprisingly, the old vines (such as those of Quinta do Caêdo and Quinta do Seixo) were also excellent.

There are “high-quality wines, very good, very interesting and elegant, with reasonable structure and lots of fruit” throughout the region. Luís said that this was **“a very promising year for the Douro”**, and he is most optimistic about the development of the wine. Good news, then, for Casa Ferreirinha wines.

Port wines also had a very promising year, yet there is some important additional news: **“The elegant profile and good acidity of this year’s grapes are ideal for ageing and creating very good quality Tawnies”**.

This happy ending makes one reflect on the long work involved in creating Old Tawny Ports. Their distinctive quality and profile reflect careful selection, from the very beginning right up until the final batches. They benefit, too, from decades of refinement in century-old cellars. With knowledge and vision, Luís and his team strengthen and nurture the exceptional Sandeman, Ferreira and Offley wine cellars for the future, continuing the legacy of many previous generations. Perhaps decades from now, when they are relaxing over a delicious Old Tawny Port, they will be inspired to recount stories of this demanding harvest.



- **Sogrape in the Alentejo**

Luís Cabral de Almeida, Sogrape's oenologist in the Alentejo, thinks that 2021 was **"a more elegant year, with very good quality"** and higher volumes than 2020. Yields at Herdade do Peso increased significantly and were above the 10% increase forecast for the Alentejo region as a whole.



Luís said that the year was fantastic for vineyards in the Alentejo, "bad for the beach, but really great for the grapes". Herdade do Peso, to the south, had a year that was "very kind to everyone in the vineyard". The rain fell at the right time, creating good water reserves in the soil, and the warm dry spring allowed good flowering and fruit set. With stable weather, the vines grew in a harmonious and balanced way and presented no particular phytosanitary problems. The vineyard interventions followed their natural rhythm and the vines reflected the care received. They were healthy and hardy, and required less irrigation, and later on. The summer was mild, with no overly high temperatures. Unlike the excessive heat experienced in 2020, temperatures rarely went above 35°C. The cool nights provided the ideal combination for good development of the grapes. Two weeks of intense heat in early August (between 38°C and 43°C) brought ripening to a temporary standstill, with progress restored as soon as temperatures dropped a little. The perfect year and the viticultural work in the vineyards gave rise to significantly increased yields, maximised by the versatility of the new winery. As for the new vineyard planted in 2020, "it's beautiful!"

At **Herdade do Peso in Vidigueira**, the harvest started with the white grapes on 11 August and finished on 23 September, under dry weather, with no surprises, and only the occasional wait for later picking on some plots to obtain the desired quality. The machine harvest, mainly at night between midnight and 7.00 am, and the selective manual picking on special plots ensured the quality of the grapes was at its best when they arrived at the winery. Thanks to the favourable cycle and a cooler July, the grapes kept their excellent natural acidity, with some "surprising" levels achieved. It resulted in **"wines with good fruit and good tannins, complete from start to finish"**. Their profiles are distinct from the powerful wines with immediate impact and strong in volume that are typical of the region in warmer years. Rather, they are very elegant with a very long finish of excellent quality. Luís speaks of wines **"with remarkable acidity and balance"**, as well as the "fresh and aromatic" quality of the whites and rosés. His highlights for the year include the Touriga Nacional – "with notes of wild shrub", and the surprising Petit Verdot – "deep, with a somewhat wild aroma". Pride of place goes to the **consistency of the Alicante Bouschet**—the true queen of varieties on the rolling plains and high mountains of the Alentejo—that gave "some exceptional wines" from the already famous plots 3, 4, and 21 of Herdade do Peso.

Moving from the plains to the mountains of the Alentejo, Quinta do Centro in Portalegre, in the Serra de São Mamede mountain range, also had a very good year. Here, too, the favourable, mild cycle promoted good maturations and excellent natural acidity in the grapes. The harvest started later and lasted a month, from 1 September to 1 October. The red wines from Alicante Bouschet and Grand Noir – "long in the mouth, with less on entry and more in the finish"; Trincadeira – "well-structured and long in the mouth", and the whites from old vines – "some of the best yet!" are also noteworthy.

Luís said that it was **"an almost brilliant year in the Alentejo, with very good wines that will make us very happy"**.

• Sogrape in the Dão

Beatriz Cabral de Almeida, head of oenology at Quinta dos Carvalhais, said that **“2021 was a typical Dão year; hard work and demanding, but one that gave rise to delicate, fresh and elegant wines”**. Quinta dos Carvalhais almost doubled the estate’s production compared to the low figures of 2020, while regional production is up by 35%.



Situated near Mangualde in the heart of the Dão, Quinta dos Carvalhais has vineyards planted to traditional varieties of the region, with prominence given to Encruzado, Touriga Nacional and Alfrocheiro. The vineyards cover 50 ha, of which more than half (28 ha) was replanted in 2020, replacing the area affected by the 2017 fires. For the viticultural team, led by João Vasconcelos Porto, “the year was fantastic for the new vines”. Beatriz agrees. “The new vineyard is growing very well and is very beautiful”. She is already dreaming of the 2022–23 harvest. For the moment, she is relying on the established vineyards only. The viticultural cycle was “normal and without any great pressure of diseases”, although the vines were affected by low temperatures and rain at crucial moments, such as flowering and fruit set. Despite some resulting heterogeneity, the yield potential was very balanced and yields were above those of 2020. The work was done in good time and the vines were healthy, despite some delay due to a cooler than normal July, with few days above 30°C. The rain that fell on 11 August refreshed and hydrated the vineyards, which was beneficial to this estate where dry-farm cultivation and integrated production methods are a way of life. Dão is a moderate region, with summers of hot days and cool nights, ideal for ripening grapes while at the same time preserving their acidity. A change of weather is usual at the summer equinox, a risk that the region knows well.

At the end of August, maturation was long and calm, and expectations were good. **“The year initially promised to be totally awesome, but then the rain came”**, said Beatriz. It did complicate the final phase of the cycle, however. The harvest was phased, at the pace of the grapes. Between 1 and 3 September, Touriga Nacional for rosé and the most advanced parcels of Gouveio were harvested. The Jaen harvest took place the following week, on 6 and 7 September. Picking of other varieties then resumed with due haste from 13 September to 7 October. As always, the estate’s winery received grapes from selected growers in the region. These mutually rewarding partnerships mean Sogrape gets to know the growers’ vineyards and terroirs in greater detail as time goes by. In a year with more budbreak, less disease and no frost, the growers’ average yields also increased (by about 50%).

Beatriz admits that the 2021 harvest was **“hard work and exhausting”**. It required even greater care and intense attention to detail in the vineyard. It also demanded extra rigour in the winery — from selection on the sorting table to the kind of discernment needed when it comes to fermentation and the ageing process. The alternation between fine weather and rainy days generated a mix of emotions, ranging from confidence to apprehension. Beatriz is happy with the final result. **“We’ve got good wines”** and better yields. The whites and rosés were harvested earlier, under dry weather, and are very smooth and aromatic. The whites from Encruzado are structured, elegant, fresh and delicate. As for the reds, the Alfrocheiro wines are very distinctive, “with notes of wild shrubs, woodland, artichoke and fresh mushroom”, while the Touriga Nacional wines have also proven to be very elegant, “with softer colours and notes of wild berry fruits, resin and pine forest”.

Beatriz is proud of the work achieved in what has been another complex year for the region. She emphasised how **“structured, smooth, fresh and elegant”** the wines are, and has very good expectations for the first releases, anticipated in spring.



- **Sogrape in the Vinhos Verdes region**

António Braga, head of oenology at Quinta de Azevedo and responsible for Sogrape wines in the region, said it was **“a challenging year, with lower yields but good results”**, thanks to a cool cycle and rain at critical moments. Volumes fell sharply to about 40% less than the Sogrape average over the previous five years. The region recorded significant reductions in volume in areas along the coast, but some increases in the interior.



Quinta de Azevedo is located near Barcelos, in the Cávado subregion, on the Atlantic coast, only 20 km from the sea. The 34 ha of vineyards are entirely devoted to white varieties, with 23 ha of Loureiro, 10 ha of Alvarinho and a small field-blend plot. Budbreak was below average and flowering took place during cold, rainy weather, resulting in less uniform fruit set. With very well-hydrated soil, the vines grew quickly, as did all other vegetation. Keeping it under control required constant attention and repeated green interventions from the viticultural team. The wet weather was conducive to the proliferation of fungal diseases such as downy mildew that required additional preventive treatments, which were often hampered by the rain that fell as late as during June and July. The estate's vine training system (bilateral cordon, with an ample vertical leaf wall) promoted good exposure and aeration of the vines, and some warmer days in the summer allowed them to partially recover from the delay caused by days of low temperatures and overcast weather. Cool regions like this are used to later maturations and harvests, and the recurring risk of cycles ending under the threat of rain.

Quinta de Azevedo expected this year's harvest to be smaller and later than normal, but António said that the prospect of rain meant having to manage maturation-related expectations. The harvest took place between 9 and 22 September, with a few days' no harvesting to allow the grapes to reach the desired ripeness and recover from the rains that fell every three or four days since the beginning of the month.

The Alvarinho grapes tended to ripen earlier this year and generally had **“good results”**, with better quality and slightly higher yields from the younger vines (the 8 hectares planted in 2017). The Loureiro grapes (the estate's main variety) ripened later, but as soon as they were ready, they were harvested quickly to avoid compromising quality. The result was good despite the difficult year, and António said that the **“very elegant and delicate must gave rise to clean and aromatic wines”**.

In a region with climatic conditions and challenges like these, António was quick to point out the advantages of having a modern, well-equipped winery like the one at Quinta de Azevedo where everything is geared towards quick, smooth operation to obtain clean must for off-skin fermentation, with minimum oxidation throughout. The quality gains to be had from excellence in the winery are most evident in difficult years like this one. Good management not only in the winery but also overall management of the harvest by small-scale growers with whom Sogrape works was essential to ensure good results, especially given the pressure placed on everyone by the unstable weather in the area along the coast. The combined effect of less budbreak, downy mildew and rain was that yields were down 43% on 2020 figures.

António Braga said it was a demanding harvest (**“one of the most complicated”** of the 23 he's had so far), **“with lower yields, but of good quality, considering the year overall”**. He expects the wines to develop well.

- **Sogrape in Bucelas (Lisboa)**

António Braga, Sogrape's oenologist responsible for the Lisboa region, said that it was a **"very good year at Quinta da Romeira in Bucelas, with very high quality and very promising whites"** because of the favourable cycle. Yields at the estate improved by 18% and are in line with 2020, if you consider the Lisboa region as a whole.



The historic Quinta da Romeira is the main property in the Bucelas DO (Denomination of Origin). It has 75 ha of vines planted at different attitudes, on slopes with various exposures and soil types. Here, the year went smoothly and without a hitch. The winter was mild and it rained at the right time, "as it hadn't rained for a few years", and so created good reserves of water in the soil. A spring without rain and favourable temperatures allowed good flowering and fruit set, with promising yields. The trend of temperatures not being too high continued into the summer. At times, the temperatures were in the 32–35°C range, but presented no risk of scalding, as occurred during the hot 2020. The nights were always cool, promoting good maturation and preserving the natural acids of the grape. The benign year without phytosanitary problems allowed the viticultural team to intervene at exactly the right time, and to continue the important work of vineyard rehabilitation started after Sogrape purchased the estate in 2019. The extra care and pampering of the vineyard paid off. It looks very healthy, has more energy and vigour, and gave greater yields.

António Braga said that of the areas under his management, Quinta da Romeira was **"the shining star"**.

The mild year with less rain created healthy fruit and very balanced ripeness. The Arinto variety dominates the vineyard and, despite the diversity of exposures and slopes, almost all the grapes tend to be ready at the same time. In 2021, the gradual maturation of the grapes extended the harvest window, while the greater familiarity with the estate's terroirs and the Arinto variety acquired over the last three years contributed to their being harvested at the optimal time.

The harvest began on 1 September and lasted a month. It went smoothly, with dry weather throughout. Sogrape's first machine harvest trials were successful. The calmer pace also allowed for some experiments in the winery, improved this year with the installation of new equipment. António talks of a very enriching vintage, in terms of knowledge and the wines produced. **"We have very good Arinto, with lots of texture, creaminess and presence in the mouth"**. It's a high-quality year "with immense potential" for the brand's current range of wines. We can even think about the "possibility of new things, different things".

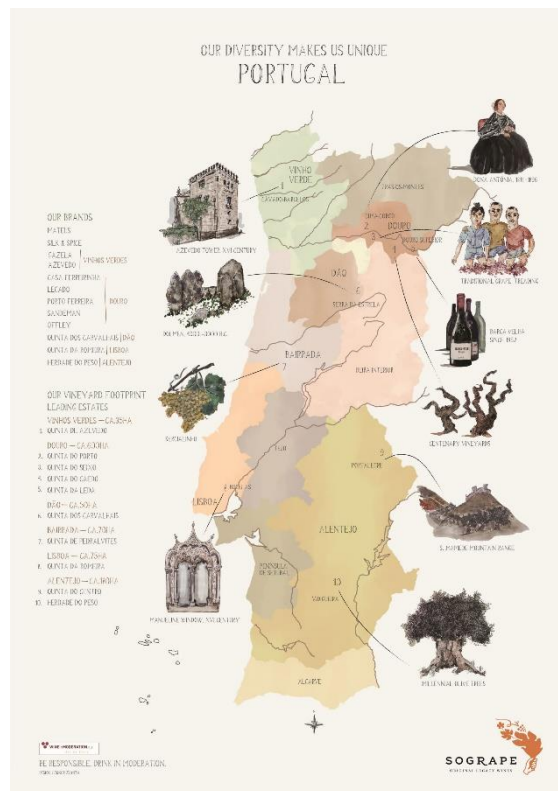
Quinta da Romeira's stars are aligned, and all augurs well for the **"high expectations"** António has for these wines.

- Other regions

Bairrada/Beira Atlântico (in the central section of the Atlantic coast of Portugal) and **Trás-os-Montes** (in the north-eastern interior, near the Douro) are **key to Mateus wines**. Sogrape buys grapes in these two regions every year from hundreds of local winegrowers. The grapes are vinified at the company's wineries in both Anadia, near the coast, and Bemposta, in Trás-os-Montes.

Head oenologist António Braga said that both places of origin have produced “**rosés with good potential**”, as expected. In Anadia (Bairrada), there are good bases for quality, aromatic and very fresh still and sparkling wines. Yields in the region declined by roughly 5% this year.

In Bemposta (Trás-os-Montes), the grapes were barely affected by the rains, very well balanced and in good condition, giving good must, “in terms of quality and quantity”. Sogrape yields were almost the same as 2020 (1% less), while the region recorded a 5% decrease compared to last year.



Quinta de Pedralvites, part of Sogrape since 1980, lies at the heart of the **Bairrada** region in Anadia, on the Atlantic coast. White varieties (Maria Gomes, Bical, Arinto, Cercial, etc.) are grown in the estate's 63 ha of vineyards. The estate also has 2.5 ha of Sercialinho, a very rare variety that has already proven its ability to produce the exceptional white wines that carry the "Série Ímpar" label.

As in other regions of the Atlantic west coast, the year was mild but unstable, with rain that hindered the viticultural cycle. The harvest began on 24 August and lasted a month, marked by almost daily rain from 7 September onwards. The equivalent of 10% of the average annual rainfall was received during this period, with 95 mm concentrated in just three days (13–15 September). Despite these setbacks, António Braga is very positive about the outcome and speaks of “**whites of great aromatic intensity and very good acidity**”, the result of the balanced maturation in this cool cycle. One of his highlights is the Sercialinho variety which did well during the year and benefited from the mild weather, “was in fine form and produced excellent wines”.



• Conclusion

In Portugal, Sogrape has estates in six wine-growing regions and works with more than two thousand winegrowers to ensure consistent access to the best quality and variety of grapes. **The review for the year was positive, the result of hard work in the vineyard and winery**, but includes some food for thought as we move towards a more sustainable future.

Although Portugal is small, the varied situations and results illustrate the diversity of regions and locations, in a year that everyone considers “challenging”. Extreme weather events recurred, with high costs and localised losses of crops and vines. The unpredictability of the weather (the new “normal”?) was compounded by labour shortages, which are becoming more keenly felt with each passing year. Viticulture is demanding outdoors work, and the timing and quality of the interventions make all the difference to the results obtained. This year confirmed the need to find viable alternatives and attract workers year-round and during the harvest period, especially in regions where mechanisation is difficult.

The 2021 cycle demonstrated clearly the importance of the choices and investments Sogrape makes in the vineyards and wineries. Careful selection and in-depth knowledge of the varieties and terroirs of Sogrape’s own vineyards and those in the regions where it operates are essential. The strengthening of the viticultural teams and the excellence of their work have ensured greater differentiation and quality in the vineyards, which are increasingly able to withstand the challenges each season presents. Experienced oenologists and well-equipped wineries make it possible to respond to the demands of the harvest and obtain good results, even in difficult years. Sogrape’s relationships with its winemakers are also strengthened every year, which will make for a better future.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued but caused little disruption, thanks to vaccination and the teams adapting well and following the strict contingency plans put in place. For the second year running, sustained effort paid off and the harvest went without incident in all Sogrape wineries in Portugal.

Now that the wines are beginning to age and prospects are good, it is time to take a deep breath and recover from the **diverse and challenging 2021 harvest that has been rewarded by good wines across the country**.

Lígia Marques
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