

Esoterica

Vermelho Forte 2008



California Fortified Dessert Wine

Varietal Blend: 65% Tinta Madeira 35% Touriga **Barrels:** 24 months in old charred 50 gallon Bourbon barrels

Chemistry at bottling: pH: 3.69 **Total Acidity:** 5.1 grams/liter **Alcohol:** 18.5% **Total SO₂:** less than 15 ppm

Date of Bottling: November 9, 2010 **Quantity Produced:** 183 cases (12 x 500ml)

Sweetness at bottling: 113 grams/liter

About the name: An agreement between the EU and the US government disallows the use of the name "Port" on American-made labels anymore; this is my new name for a Port. Translated it means, "Strong Red".

A few years ago I made a set of single variety fortified wines out of traditional Portuguese varieties. It was a fun project and I learned a lot about the merits and weaknesses of the various varieties. Of these, my two favorites were Tinta Madera and Touriga Nacional, hence the choice of varieties for this beautiful not-so-little wine. Each of them gives a distinctive element to the blend: the structure comes mostly from the Tinta Madera, while the earthy fruit comes from the Touriga. Making fortified wines is always fun. Traditionally the grapes are picked fully ripe, but not over-ripe. Fermentation is started immediately and the grapes are macerated for a short few days. In days of old, this was done by treading the fermenting wine in big, shallow vats in bare feet. These days, the health folks don't see that as a very sanitary practice, so we do it with big stainless steel mechanical feet and pumps-not as romantic, but a lot easier to clean up. The moment the fermentation gets to the point where the sugar and alcohol are where you want them, fortification alcohol is added and the fermentation immediately stops. This moment nearly always comes in the middle of the night. This is one of the trials of being a winemaker: deciding to leave a warm bed to get the wine's balance right. You will find that I didn't fail my profession: the wine's balance is perfect . . . and my wife kindly kept the bed warm for me. The style of this wine is like a vintage port, big, grapey, tannic and fresh. It is the perfect way to end an evening.