

Isabella a Proibida



Just one short decade after launching Fitapreta Vinhos in sunny Alentejo, António and two other partners founded the Azores Wine Company on the island of Pico (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) after becoming inspired by their shared work recovering the indigenous Terrantez do Pico varietal—not to mention António’s many childhood trips to his father’s Azorean homeland. The initial bottling of Terrantez do Pico made a splash in the wine world, receiving a top score from Wine Spectator, and a mention in their article “Breaking the Mold” in 2016. António and his partners own 100 hectares of extremely low-yield, walled vineyards (primarily on Pico) and purchase fruit from an additional 30 hectares across the archipelago, from regions such as DOP Graciosa, São Miguel, and others. These sites range from sea level to 500 meters in altitude, with the oldest vines averaging up to 80 years. It is from this stony volcanic terroir that according to Antonio, “these singular, saline wines are born, or should we say, erupt.” On cold and wet Pico Island, vines struggle to escape the volcano’s rain shadow grasping for sunlight along the island’s edge, where 500-year-old volcanic stone walls (known as currais) are all that stand between the plants and dangerously salty Atlantic winds. Making wine on Pico, according to António, is a constant “battle between the sea and the mountain” and he is one of very few who have succeeded in achieving ripeness in red grapes here.

WHAT MAKES THIS WINE UNIQUE?: This is a wine made from a hybrid of *Vitis Vinifera* and *Vitis Labrusca*. In addition to making it very resistant to phylloxera, the *Labrusca* element gives Isabella an intoxicating, sauvage quality on the nose. Simultaneously delicate and powerful, Isabella is an incredibly versatile wine, with food-friendly acidity, a profound mineral signature and terrific concentration.

RATING HISTORY: 2017 94 “Excellent Value” Forbes; 2015 90WA

GRAPE: 100% Isabella. Sustainably grown vines planted in volcanic basalt soils at sea level (0 m elevation). Antonio has rescued an old plot of this unique varietal for a passion project, to show that this grape is capable of making spectacular wine.

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: Isabella’s high toned acidity makes it a wonderful red for seafood, and its concentration gives it great versatility. Mushrooms, game and rich seafood dishes are all terrific pairs.

VINIFICATION AND AGING: Harvested by hand to 40 kg baskets. Manual bunch selection, 24 hr maceration in stainless steel tank. Gravity-flow racking to stainless steel in 600 and 1000 L tank, where it is aged for 12 months.

LOCATION, SOIL, CLIMATE: Pico, in the Azores, is about 1000 miles off the coast of Portugal. It is dominated by the volcano Ponta do Pico, Portugal’s highest mountain. The soil is entirely black basalt, which puts enormous stress on the vines, lowering yields. Vines are the only crop to speak of on Pico, as other plant life has a difficult time surviving. The average elevation of the vineyards is sea level (0m). Temperature from April to October is 60-70 degrees Fahrenheit (15-21 C), with annual rainfall of 1200mm (47”).

TASTING NOTES Brilliant ruby-purple. On the nose, explosive aromas of sour cherry, cranberry, sour beer, beef blood, and sea spray. On the palate, high-toned, juicy red cherry fruit, with mouth watering acidity and a pronounced salinity. Funky and sauvage through the mid-palate, finishing with umami-laden flavors of meat, seaweed and wet stone. Impressive clarity and concentration.

ALCOHOL CONTENT: 2015: 12.5% / 2016: 12%

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