

My inspiration for this month's column came when picking the wines to match our menu for our special 'Sharrow Bay in the city' week long event at the prestigious Harvey Nichols restaurant in Knightsbridge. After a hugely successful event last year we were delighted to be asked to return to the store as part of the annual British Food Fortnight celebrations. I can't believe the number of bookings we have had for the event, they are magnificent. With most of the produce sourced from farms in Cumbria, it is a real feather in the cap for our fantastic food orientated region.

One of my wine choices for this menu was port. Many people ask me the question 'how do you make port'. Well Port is a fortified wine that comes from the Douro Valley in the North of Portugal. Produced since the mid 15th Century, Port is as we all know hugely popular in England.

There is no easy way to make Port. The process involves picking grapes before crushing them and placing them in a tank. After remaining in this tank for nearly twenty-four hours, the grapes begin to ferment and their sugar turns into alcohol.

With Port wine, after fermentation begins, timing takes over. Unlike wine the fermentation is stopped. This is extremely important and is achieved by mixing with a clear brandy. The alcohol in the brandy kills the yeast in the wine, causing fermentation to cease. The ending result is a sweet wine that is about twenty percent alcohol. These characteristics make port so simple and easy to match with any dish and at any time in the day. Port can be cooked with, it can be matched with desserts (especially sticky toffee pudding), cheese and even be used as an aperitif or conversely an after dinner drink with a cigar.

Though there are many styles of Port - White Port, Ruby Port, Tawny Port, Vintage Port, Late Bottled Vintage Port. Most of these styles fall into two broad categories: Bottle aged or Cask aged. Because doing the tiniest thing different will result in a different taste of wine, the two Port processes greatly dictate the flavorful outcome. While Bottle aged Ports generally keep their color and their fruitiness well into maturity, Cask aged Ports lose flavor quickly. They are ready to drink right away.

I have been lucky enough to visit the Douro Valley and stay at the famous Port Estate Adriano Ramos Pinto which is our house port on the Sharrow wine list. Another big advocate of Port was my colleague Franck Gerome who has returned to his native France. I would like to wish him all the best for the future.

A votre santé

Nico

www.sharrowbay.co.uk