



The view from the Gran Hotel La Toja is in the Ría de Arousa Estuary, next to the O Grove Peninsula in Galicia, Spain.

Oporto to Rías Baixas (Galicia, Spain)

AFTER THE PREVIOUS DAY on the Duoro River, we toured Oporto and its sister city of Vila Nova de Gaia. This location presents many photo opportunities, especially those taken from the bridge spanning the Duoro. We spent much of the day walking through different parts of Oporto with several Port tastings and tours of Port wine lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia.

The cellars at Graham's were very large and in perfect order. The library featured displays and write-ups of some of the most significant vintages of the last 150 years. The Sandeman tour was very interesting and was held in the cellar standing by the iconic trademark silhouette of Sandeman. We toured the display of the history of bottles used to hold Port dating from the engraved 1752 bottle for Abel Gammon. We finished the visit with a tasting of various Ruby, Vintage, and Tawny Ports and were then ready for a nap.

For our final dinner together, we ate at the 2-Star Guide Michelin restaurant in the Yeatman. The meal was one of the most beautifully prepared I've ever seen. I've included photos of two of the 20 courses, all of which were fabulous. This outstanding dinner at this top-notch restaurant overlooking Oporto situated along the Duoro served as a perfect ending for this part of our experience. This dinner marked the end of the trip for all but seven of us who continued in our quest for knowledge of the Albariño grape.



Our group stopped at the Yeatman Gastronomic Restaurant which has panoramic views over Porto.



Jim Bryant, Barb Pollack, and Yeatman Restaurant Executive Chef Ricardo Costa.



Rabelo boats on the Duoro River showcase various Port brands.



A crab hors d' oeuvres and hand-crafted, edible "butterfly" appetizer.

HEADING TO NORTHWEST SPAIN

The following morning the seven of us left Oporto bound for Rías Baixas in the far northwestern corner of Spain (Galicia). This area is most known for being the best area for growing the Albariño grape from which the eponymous wine is made.

I have long been a fan of this grape, and we seized the opportunity to expand our knowledge by visiting this remote location. Two hours away, we stopped at Gran Hotel La Toja for refreshments of pastries and coffee. The restaurant, situated on the water, was beautiful and the experience was delightful.

Several hours later, we made our first winery visit to perhaps the most famous and popular producer of Albariño—Pazo de Señoráns. We toured the small, family-owned church on the property which was beautiful on the



The entrance to Graham's Port Lodge.



A 1752 English mallet-style wine bottle with the name Abel Gammon and the silhouette of Sandeman at the Sandeman Port Wine Cellars in Portugal.

outside and inside. Next, we toured the owner's estate which was stunning. We then returned to the main building for a tasting of four Albariños, with variations determined by years and vineyard locations. All were reminiscent of the Pazo de Señoráns' style with the basic Pazo de Señoráns having palid straw-yellow with greenish tints. The wine has medium-high intensity with well-balanced acidity and relatively low alcohol, which makes it great for food paring, especially with products of the sea. Although most Albariño is consumed young (1–3 years), I find it lasts much longer (5–8 years) if stored in a cool cellar.

The Pazo de Señoráns Colección was firmer, elegant, and complex with great aromatics. The Selección de Añada, like the first two tasted, sees only stainless steel but has six times more aging in the vats on the lees which results in a fuller, richer tasting wine without maturation in oak. My final



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The Pazo de Señorans entrance and onsite chapel's exterior and interior.

bottles of the 2005 vintage remain very impressive with their high intensity, great expression, minerality, and ample body. The Tras los Muros was aged in oak and was not my style.

A MEAL FOR THE AGES

We left this great tasting and went to a nearby Guide Michelin restaurant for a fabulous lunch and wine experience. The owner/chef adopted our table and prepared special dishes to go with great wines and we all loved the experience. As we were near our hotel, the Parador de Cambados, we checked into this beautiful mansion built in the 17th century and then continued to our next winery visit—Pazo Baión. The grounds of this estate were magnificent. The vineyards excellently displayed the trellis system used in Rías Baixas where Albariño is grown to effectively raise the vine's canopy so that in this area's high rainfall and humidity, the grapes can more easily dry to prevent or minimize grape disease.

After a tasting of the excellent Albariños produced by Pazo Baión, we returned to our Parador and got ready for a very memorable dinner on property accompanied by many appropriately paired wines. This was a great way to end our first day in Rías Baixas.

Our highlight of the day came next at the famous Vilagarcía de Arousa. This estate is huge, even though it remains a very small portion of its original size. It dates to the 9th century and has some of the oldest and largest trees in Spain, dating back to the 1700s in some cases.

We had a walking tour of part of the estate and were extremely impressed with its beauty. I have included a selection of the various species of trees, including a Southern Magnolia, Eucalyptus, and Bald Cypress to capture the feeling of the estate. These species and many others were gigantic in size and had been planted and left undisturbed to produce an effect rarely seen today.

The winery here is Pazo de Rubianes, which produces exceptional wines that sell out quickly. We had only the most recent vintage of Albariño, but it was memorable. The estate also is known for producing some of the best skin care oils which we all tried and bought. What a beautiful place to visit.

We went to a seafood restaurant in nearby Porto de Sanxenxo and had a long and exceptional lunch of crab, scampi, and lobster accompanied by Albariños from Villanueva and Pazo de Rubianes and my other favorite Spanish white wine, Godello from Adega Algueira. We ate and drank like we were on vacation doing what we wanted to do in the place we wanted to be! What memories to cap a great experience. A Vötre Santé. 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSANO

Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.



The wines served at Porto de Sanxenxo.



The entrance to Pazo Baión.



The wines tasted at Pazo de Señorans.



Grapevines are trellised for better light, less disease and insect damage, and for easier harvesting.



The harbor view at Porto de Sanxenxo.



Spectacular trees at Vilagarcía de Arousa include two views of the Southern Magnolia, a Eucalyptus, and a Bald Cypress.