

# Blue Danube Wine Company

## Central European White Varietals

**Cserszegi Fűszeres (chair-se-gee foozer-esh)** - A grape variety native to Hungary. In 1960 Bakonyi Károly crossed Irsai Oliver and Piroso Traminer (Gewürztraminer) in the town of Keszthely to make Cserszegi Fűszeres. The variety ripens late September, and is resistant to rot and frost making it very suitable for Central European growing region. It produces scintillatingly fresh and perfumed whites meant for early consumption. Typically quite low in alcohol it makes an excellent spring or summer aperitif.

**Debit** - Little is known about this indigenous white grape. As legend has it, Croats opted to pay Napoleon's taxes with the grape. So, the debt became Debit...What it was called before then is a mystery as is the origin of the grape. Some believe that it is a clone of Italy's Trebbiano but this has not been verified by genetic testing. It can be made in a range of styles, from fresh and mineral to oak aged and full plus any way in between. If the yields are kept low it produces delicious, subtle wine perfect for crudo.

**Irsai Oliver (ear- shy oliver)** - A Hungarian white wine variety, crossed between the obscure and local Pozsonyi and Pearl of Csaba in 1930. It is early ripening, with a distinctive Muscat character. Irsai Oliver is popular in Hungary. Even modestly priced examples are filled with the grapes characteristic bouquet of fresh flowers and lime. Made dry to off dry and intensely aromatic it makes a great compliment to strong, spicy cuisine.

**Királyleányka (kir-aahy-le-aahn-kah)** - An uncommon white grape originating in Transylvania between the 1st and 2nd World Wars, probably a cross between Kövérszőlő and Leányka. The "little princess" as the name is translated, is grown in Hungary, Transylvania, Romania and Moldova. It yields aromatic, full-bodied wines that tend to age well.

**Pošip (po-ship)** - An ancient autochthonous white wine grape grown in the Dalmatian region on the island of Korčula, Croatia. The primary growing regions are in Čara and Smokvica, which are two villages on the island. Among the grapes that ampelographers question whether they are the same grapes or different varieties are Hungary's Furmint and the Romanian grape Grasă de Cotnari. Pošip produces complex dry wines with medium to full body and tropical/grapefruit flavors. Some examples are capable of short term aging 5-7 years. It is a natural companion for fish dishes as well as prsut (cured Croatian ham) and lighter cheeses.

**Welschriesling aka Graševina (welsh-reez-ling & grash-e-vina)** - An ancient variety of white wine grape grown throughout Central Europe. Welschriesling has uncertain origin. The term "Welsch" means foreign, clearly stating that this is not Rhine Riesling. The German name "Welschriesling" literally means 'Romanic Riesling', and most of the synonyms in Central Europe are variations on 'Italian Riesling'. It might have come to Central Europe via the Romans, the Croatian name Graševina suggests that the origin might be somewhere to the east of the Balkans. In Germany and Austria it is often a sweet wine but when grown in the right place it can produce delicious, savory dry whites with great depth, food compatibility and a tendency to age well.

## Central European Red Varietals

**Blatina (blah-tina)** - A red wine grape variety autochthonous of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unlike most varietals it is not hermaphroditic and so cannot self-pollinate. In vintages where it rains during flowering and there is little or no fruit set it is referred to as "praznobačva" (empty barrel). In proper vintages though Blatina produces wines with dark ruby color, a pronounced nose of spice, smoke and berry fruit and gripping acidity. Sometimes it is fermented quickly and bottled immediately for a fresh lighter styled red. Other versions are oak aged and concentrated

**Crljenak Kastelanski (curl-yen-ik kastel-yanskee)** - A very old Croatian red variety with a very tricky name, but surprise, surprise, in Italy it is Primitivo and in California it is Zinfandel. DNA fingerprinting conducted by Carol Meredith at UC Davis revealed that these three grapes are genetically identical. It also appears that "CK" is a parent, along with the Dobricic variety, of Plavac Mali; Croatia's best-known red grape. As most of these old vines were wiped out after phylloxera it remains to be seen what the Croatian versions of this grape will taste like. Likely the best will be fruity, full-bodied wines with a similar exotic array of aromas to that of Plavac Mali. It should be exciting to watch how the story develops as more of the newly planted vineyards begin producing wines.

**Portugieser (port-u-geezer)** - A red Austrian and German wine grape found primarily in much of Germany, Lower Austria and Hungary, where it is one of the permitted grapes in the Hungary's Egri Bikavér (Bull's Blood). Most producers vinify it as a simple light red wine, which is characterized by a fresh raspberry, tart acidity and light body. It is also frequently vinified as a rosé. Despite the suggestion of the grape's name of having Portuguese origin, there is little evidence that ampelographers have uncovered to suggest that is the case. It is often said that the Austrian Baron von Fries brought it from Oporto to his estates near Voslau in 1772. In Hungary it was until recently called Kékoportó for that reason. Despite the foreign story Portugieser taste much like the other cool climate reds of this area including Blaufränkisch and could perhaps be related. It is ideal with gamey fowl or mushroom dishes.

**St Laurent (Saint lau-rant)** - According to genetic analysis, this variety originates from Burgundy, France and is an old clone of Pinot Noir. It comes from the region of today's France from where it was spread to Germany in the mid-19th century. Early budding, it ripens in mid-late September. Used to produce a rich-looking red wine with pronounced fruity, flowery aromas. In Austria only about 2,500 acres of the grape are farmed, primarily in the regions Niederösterreich and Burgenland. This is due to the grapes susceptibility to certain diseases and difficulty to grow. However, it does play a role in some of Austria's best reds and is known to please even the most rigid Burgundy aficionados.

# Vinos Unico Importers

## Portuguese White Varietals

**Alvarinho (al-vuh-reen-yo)** – Better known in Spain’s Rias Baixas region as Albariño. An old grape variety of exceptional quality, deservedly famed for the varietal wines it produces in the Vinho Verde region, specifically in the two sub-regions of Monção and Melgaço. Alvarinho has a highly characteristic floral and fruity profile with notes of lime, mint, honeysuckle, peach, grapefruit and apple, all well integrated with the high acidity typical of crisp white wines from north-west Portugal. The grapes yield balanced wines with good structure and alcohol levels. A legend says Alvarinho was a grape brought from Germany by monks during the middle ages. When you break down the name, “Alva” means white and “rinho” is said to be the Rhine River in Germany, the “white varietal of the Rhine”. The Rhine is known for their Riesling and uncannily some Alvarinho’s do age remarkably long so there may be some truth to this legend.

**Antão Vaz (an-town vash)** - One of the most important grape varieties of Alentejo. Originally from Vidigueira, in the south of Alentejo, it is very resistant to drought and diseases. Wines produced by Antão Vaz are full bodied and very aromatic (mostly with aromas of tropical fruit) and usually citrine coloured. It does well in either stainless steel tanks or oak barrels. During blind tastings many people get fooled into thinking its Chardonnay though minus the butter.

**Arinto (ah-reen-toh)** – One of Portugal’s oldest indigenous varieties, with a long tradition in the Bucelas region, it has now spread to most wine regions given its adaptability to different terrains and climates. Arinto, known as Pedernã in Vinho Verde, holds good acidity as one of its key features combined with structure and a velvety feel. Its aroma is relatively discreet, whose strongest notes are mineral, with green apple and lemon. Arinto yields wines that age very well in the bottle, acquiring elegance and complexity. Arinto can be used to make bright fresh “Espumante” or Portugal’s version of sparkling wine, it also takes well to oak aging.

**Maria Gomes (Gomes rhymes with Nomes’shh)** – Maria Gomes may sound like the Latina next door but is in fact another of Portugal’s oldest varieties and by far one of the most cultivated. Also known as Fernão Pires throughout the rest of Portugal it is found in virtually all winegrowing regions, with the most planting in Ribatejo and Bairrada, where the locals call it Maria Gomes though nobody can remember why. A high-yielding vine, that sometimes comes under criticism for producing one-dimensional wines lacking in acidity and prone to oxidation. But attentive care can bring out its extraordinary aromas and capacity to produce distinctive wines with strong character. It shows ripe citrus aromas such as lime and orange, putting it in the family of aromatic grapes with Alvarinho and Moscatel.

**Roupeiro (roo-pie-row)** - Grown mostly in the interior of Portugal where it is also known as Síria. It has been the most planted white grape variety in the Alentejo region. Roupeiro is a very productive grape variety of small bunches and berries. Though it is resistant to powdery and downy mildew, it is very sensitive to rot. Wines produced with this grape are delicate, fresh and elegant.

**Trajadura (tra-juh-doo-h-ruh)** – This is a variety cultivated throughout the Vinho Verde region though it is originally from the northern most sub-region of Monção. A grape known for quality, it produces musts of delicate aroma though naturally lacking in acidity especially if grown in very hot climates, it is best used as a blending grape. It makes deep golden straw colored wines with aromas of ripe macerated tree fruits (apples, pears, and peach) and a smooth, round flavor that tends to become a little unbalanced due to the lack of acidity. It is also known as Treixadura in Galicia Spain and is used in much the same way for blending.

**Verdelho (Ver-dih-yo)** - Famous for being one of the grape varieties used in the production of Madeiras fortified wine. After the phylloxera plague, its cultivation in the island decreased; however, it is still used in the production of table and fortified wines like “White Port” in the Douro Valley. Verdelho is also grown in the Azores particularly the island of Pico where Ron Silva a Portuguese descendant and Lodi grape farmer found his cuttings. At one point in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century a dessert wine produced on Pico made with Verdelho was one of the most expensive and sought out wines of the world, records showed the Czars of Russia would routinely pay the best prices to scoop up the entire yearly harvest! This grape variety has also been widely planted for the production of Australian wines. Wines produced with Verdelho are very aromatic and balanced. Madeira wines made from this grape variety are off dry and have delicate aromas.

## Portuguese Red Varietals

**Alfrocheiro (al-fro-shy-ro)** - It is in the high elevation cool climate Dão region that this variety has greatest expression, being used in many of the regions wines and considered by several oenologists as a very high quality grape. Cultivation of this grape variety which also known in the area of the Douro as Alfrocheiro Preto, it has also successfully spread to the Alentejo and Ribatejo regions, as well as to the area of Palmela. As Alfrocheiro is very fertile, it is necessary to control its production, in order for the berries not to lose qualities such as color. It is also important to closely manage this grape variety during harvest, since it is early ripening and very susceptible to diseases, especially rot. Alfrocheiro produces deeply coloured wines, with aromas resembling wild fruit, ripened blackberries and spices.

**Aragonez (era-go-nesh)** - One of the most famous grape varieties of the Iberian Peninsula. It is originally from Spain, where it goes by the name "Tempranillo", also being known as Tinta Roriz in Northern Portugal. Aragonez is a very fine variety of extraordinary quality, attested by its presence in two legendary wines produced on the Iberian Peninsula: the Portuguese “Barca Velha” and the Spanish “Vega Sicilia”. This grape has also been grown for centuries in the Alentejo, sometimes spelled as Aragonês. In good years it produces full-bodied, inky and highly aromatic wines. The grape has fine and delicate aromas of pepper and berries. It can have high yields and is indispensable in the blend of a good port. It also makes great single varietal wines particularly in the Dão.

**Baga (bah-guh)** – A notoriously difficult grape to grow, sometimes only properly ripening 3 out of every 10 years. Equal patience is needed during wine making as the thick skins can produce a fiercely tannic wine that only long bottle age can tame. One of the highest yielding Portuguese grape varieties, spread throughout the country but most concentrated in Bairrada and Dão. The grapes come into their own when well ripe, showing wines of deep color and great structure, with powerful tannins and everything in place to evolve well in the bottle. The aroma starts out with berry fruit developing into purple plum, tobacco and coffee, finishing in a crescendo of complexity. Under the right winemaker such as the legendary Luis Pato magic can be made, by the way Luis Pato’s nickname is “Mr. Baga”. If you love aged Barolo or Barbaresco, Baga will be right up your alley.

**Touriga Nacional (tooh-reeh-ga nah-show-nal)** – In days gone by Touriga Nacional was the dominant variety in the Dão region, responsible almost single-handedly for the fame of Dão wines. During France's phylloxera crisis of the late 1800s Touriga from the Dão was routinely shipped in bulk to Bordeaux and bottled as such. Nowadays it is one of the most popular varieties in the Douro and is considered one of Portugal's finest grapes. Touriga Nacional yields inky, full-bodied, powerful wines with exceptional aromas. It frequently shows blackberry, blueberry, rock rose and rosemary notes. Its renown has caused its spread throughout all regions from the northernmost corners and down to the Algarve, and it is even exciting the interest of vine growers abroad. Touriga Nacional wines age well and gain aromatic complexity with barrel aging.

**Trincadeira (trink-kah-die-ruh)** – This grape is believed to have originated from north Africa's Tunisia and was apparently brought to Portugal by the Moors who used it primarily for making raisins. Now it is one of the most widespread Portuguese grape varieties. It shows best, however, in hot, dry and very bright areas, tailor-made, in fact for the Alentejo. It is not easy to grow, however, having irregular yields and prone to disastrous molds. But in good years Trincadeira will produce great wines. It has excellent acidity, soft tannins and abundant, intense aromas of plum and blackberry, producing elegant and balanced wines. A Trincadeira blend with Aragonez in the Alentejo or Touriga Nacional in the Douro will result in top quality wines.

## Spanish White Varietal

**Hondarribi Zuri (on-dar-reeh-bee zoo-reeh)** - The main varietal in the traditional Basque Txakoli wines. This grape is also known as Ondarribi or as Courbu in the French Basque areas. Zuri is a vigorous vine yielding plenty of small grained fruit. It is well known for its searing laser like acidity with citrus (lemon and lime) notes and some wines are bottled with a slight natural effervescence. Arguably one the best wines to have with seafood especially raw items like oysters.

## Spanish Red Varietals

**Hondarribi Beltza (on-dar-reeh-bee belt-zuh)** - The much rarer red varietal of the Basque country. A very delicate grape that is very difficult to grow, it sometimes ripens only three out of every ten years. It is sometimes added to the white wines of the Basque region in very small amounts to add aroma and complexity. As a single varietal red Txakoli it is hard to find outside of the Basque country, very distinct in profile it would be most reminiscent of Loire Valley Cabernet Franc with green pepper corn like nose and curranty fruit on the palate.

**Mencia (men-thee-uh)** - A grape variety that traditionally produced light, pale, relatively fragrant red wines for early consumption. It was once thought to be an ancient clone of Cabernet Franc, an impression which has been dispelled with DNA testing. More recent hillside plantings and careful vineyard management have produced bigger wines of greater depth and age worthiness. It is also known in Portugal under the name Jaen. The main plantings are in Spain's north-western Bierzo and Ribeira Sacra regions. Since the 1970s, the grape is increasing in popularity, and an increasing number of noted Spanish winemakers are now working with it producing many new and exciting results.