



WINEMAKERS TO WATCH: FLÁVIO PIZZATO

Pizzato, which has increased its vine land since the 1960s to 42ha, moved from selling its wine to the Aurora Co-op to making and selling its own labels, Pizzato and Fausto, in 1999. It now makes 65,000 bottles a year and also sells grapes to other Serra Gaúcha producers. Winemaker Flávio Pizzato (below) followed up a masters in engineering with viticultural studies and then worked in Mendoza wineries before returning to the family business. All grapes are hand picked and he focuses on 100% varieties and primary fruit, so oak use is minimal and alcohol levels are tempered. His Merlot, Tannat, Egiodola and Alicante Bouschet are future stars. www.pizzato.net. Tina Gellie



FULL OF PROMISE

Regional and varietal diversity are the buzzwords at an exciting stage of Brazil's wine evolution, discovers
SIMON WOODS

REBO, ARINARNOA AND EGIODOLA... No, they're not the natural heirs of Kaka, Robinho and Ronaldinho on the football field, they're just three of a surprisingly large cast of grape varieties employed by Brazil's burgeoning wine industry. Already the country is the fifth-largest producer in the southern hemisphere, and although most of the wine is drunk by a thirsty home market, it's now beginning to make an impact overseas.

Within that little-known trio of grapes, Arinarnoa (a cross of Merlot

with Petit Verdot) and Egiodola (Fer Servadou x Abouriou) hail from France, but Rebo (Merlot x Teroldego) is of Italian origin. So too are most of the country's wine producers. Between 1875 and 1914, over 100,000 Italians, most of them small farmers from the Veneto, emigrated to Brazil, and it didn't take them long to turn their attention to wine production.

The Brazilians consider there to have been four periods of wine history since then. The first, from 1875 to the 1930s, saw the development of vineyards of either indigenous varieties or North American hybrids such as Isabella, firstly by the Italians and later by German immigrants. The next stage, up until the late 1960s, was one of stagnation, but then came the third period, during which *Vitis vinifera* began to muscle its way into the vineyards. This was the era when the Brazilians developed a taste for sparkling wine, and many wineries were established to cater for this trend.

Above: the view from Cave Geisse in Pinto Bandeira, the highest region in Serra Gaúcha, founded by Mário Geisse

The current stage, starting in the late 1990s, has seen several of those wineries expand from sparkling production into still wines. It's early days for these, but already there are several reds that can compete on a world stage. Merlot is the main trump card, and while the flavours are generally plush and welcoming, most wineries exercise a light hand in terms of extraction and oak. You'll also find decent Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir and, thanks to the northern Italian heritage, Nebbiolo, Anceletta and (especially) Teroldego. Miolo's Quinta do Seival hints at a promising future for Portuguese varieties.

Whites lag behind. They're well made, but a little on the 'safe' side. There's also something of a fear of barrel ageing, for both whites and reds. 'We want our wines to express their fruit and terroir rather

MARTA AGOAS

700km inland from Recife, and 4,000km north of Serra Gaúcha, is Vale do São Francisco, which makes 95% of Brazil's table grapes and now some good wine. Marta Agoas, winemaker at ViniBrasil (owned by Portugal's Dão Sul) has the challenge of working 200ha, divided into 20ha lots, capable of making 1.5 million litres of wine a year. At 8° south, the average annual temperature is 27°C, meaning a continuous vine growing cycle. Through irrigation and pruning, Agoas can control the production cycle of each plot, ensuring a steady flow of 24 harvests a year on the various plots



– all done by hand. Portuguese varieties Touriga Nacional and Aragonéz are proving successful, as are international red blends. www.vinibrasil.com.br TG

than be oaky,' I was told at more than one winery. An admirable sentiment, but one that seems to place a barrique as purely a source of flavour – many wines would be all the better for a period of careful ageing.

Most sparkling wines are of the cheap and cheerful variety, produced using the Charmat method (which has a second fermentation in bulk tanks, rather than in the bottle) and sold at their youngest and ➤



MÁRIO GEISSE

In 1979 Chilean Mário Geisse (who came to Brazil with Moët & Chandon in 1976) founded the region of Pinto Bandeira, at 850 metres' altitude. He set up Cave de Amadeu, of which Cave Geisse is the label for traditional-method fizz. The gravity-fed winery is noted for its innovations, such as a Turbine Pest Control machine, which acts as a giant hairdryer, blowing 150°C air at 200km/h on to the vines. The weekly flash pasteurisation not only kills insects, meaning the winery is pesticide-free, but the heat shock releases an adrenaline-like surge in the vines which boosts their immune system, making them more disease resistant. Geisse has 23ha, meaning just 100,000 bottles a year are made – all vintage wines, from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. www.amadeu.com.br TG

freshest. The best of these tend to be the sweeter styles, made from Prosecco or members of the Moscato family – yet more evidence of the Italian legacy. Méthode Champenoise sparklers also exist, and when they're given plenty of time on the lees, as Casa Valduga does with its top cuvées, the results can be superb.

RAPID PROGRESS

A further facet of the current era of Brazilian wine is the focus on regionality. The most intriguing region is the Vale do São Francisco. Lying at 8° south of the Equator, it's a semi-arid region with 600mm of rain per year. There is little seasonal variation, and through careful use of irrigation, the vines can be urged to yield grapes throughout the year. Moreover, the vines can be persuaded to yield two crops or more per year, and with the opportunity to conduct continuous experiments, progress is rapid. While no one is claiming that this is a place in which to make fine wine, it has great potential for decent, everyday drinking reds.

The bulk of Brazil's vineyards lie much further south. Serra Gaúcha in the province of Rio Grande do Sul is the heartland of the industry, with the Vale dos Vinhedos (see Little Italy, p122) home to the best-known producers. Many of these have vineyards in other parts of the province.

South of Serra Gaúcha, along the Uruguayan border, lies the region of Campanha. Where Serra Gaúcha undulates and resembles parts of Piedmont or Beaujolais, Campanha is flatter, making it easier for mechanised viticulture, and has soils based on granite rather than basalt. Judging by the wines from those who have vineyards in both regions (such as Lidio Carraro), those from Campanha tend



JUAREZ VALDUGA

Casa Valduga boasts South America's biggest sparkling wine cellar, holding 2.5 million bottles, but with capacity for 12 million. The winery, an old church, is a comfort for owner Juarez Valduga, who trained to be a priest before joining his winemaker brother João to take over the family business. Valduga is big on wine tourism, with plans for six boutique hotels, three restaurants and a spa to add to the gardens, guesthouses, eateries and visitor attractions. Its 250ha in Vale dos Vinhedos and Encruzilhada do Sul, some 130 years old, are planted to an

to be more structured and less rich than their Serra Gaúcha counterparts.

There are also vineyards being planted on higher ground to the northwest of Serra Gaúcha in Campos de Cima da Serra, in Rio Grande do Sul, and Planalto Catarinense, just over the border in Santa Catarina. Despite being further north, it's considerably cooler here, thanks to the



ABOVE: harvesting in Serra do Sudeste
ABOVE LEFT: Petit Verdot crossed with Merlot gives the little-known Arinarnoa



array of grapes, but the best include red rarities Arinarnoa, Ancelotta and Marselan. www.casavalduga.com.br TG

altitude (over 1,000m), and while it's early days for the region, it has the potential to produce some of Brazil's top white wines.

These newer regions, like most of Brazil's vineyards, get enough rainfall to survive most of the time without irrigation. Indeed, humidity is on the high side in many areas, although as vineyards move from the traditional horizontal pergola

'Little seasonal variation means the vines can be coaxed into yielding grapes throughout the year'

system to vertical trellising, it's no longer the problem it was. But it does have an impact on the style of the wines. Whereas many New World reds from arid, irrigated regions have a boldness and brightness to their fruit flavours, those from Brazil often have more of an earthy, European feel to them. They're very good now, but if progress continues at the current speed, the best is very much still to come. **D**

Simon Woods is a wine writer, author and broadcaster

BEST OF BRAZIL

CAVE GEISSE, NATUR TERROIR, PINTO BANDEIRA 2003 ★★★★★

A top drop. 62% Chardonnay and 38% Pinot Noir, it spends three years on its lees. A toasty, biscuity nose leads on to a crisp lemon and green apple palate and a long, runny-honeyed finish. Drink now. **N/A UK; www.amadeu.com.br**

CORDELIER, BRUT CHAMPENOISE, VALE DOS VINHEDOS NV ★★★★★

This 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir has 18 months' lees ageing, giving hazelnut and fresh green apple notes. It's bright, focused and linear with great freshness and balance. Drink now. **N/A UK; www.cordelier.com.br**

SALTON, MOSCATEL, VALE DOS VINHEDOS NV ★★★

Brazil's biggest family-owned winery makes 4.5 million bottles of fizz every year and Moscatel is the top seller. White peach fruit, lovely sugar and acid balance, and a not-too-frothy mousse. Drink now. **N/A UK; www.salton.com.br**

CASA VALDUGA, GRAN RESERVE CHARDONNAY, VALE DOS VINHEDOS 2008 ★★★★★

Serious, Burgundian style. This spends six months in French and Romanian oak. Stewed apple and vanilla nose then tropical fruit and a creamy cashew on the palate. Lovely weight and acidity and length. Drink now–2011. **N/A UK; www.casavalduga.com.br**

SUL BRASIL, DADIVAS CHARDONNAY, ENCRUZILHADA DO SUL 2008 (tank sample) ★★★★★

This punches well above its weight in the price:quality ratio – evidenced by the fact it was sold out well before release. Juicy, minerally white peach and yellow apple fruit with bright, mouthwatering acidity. Drink now–2010. **N/A UK; www.lidiocarraro.com**

DOM CÂNDIDO, GRAN RESERVA CABERNET, VALE DOS VINHEDOS 2004 ★★★★★

Made only in the best harvests from a 1ha plot, this spends six months in French oak and two years in bottle before release. Smooth, textured, juicy red and black fruits and sweet spice. Italian style. Drink now–2014. **N/A UK; www.domcandido.com.br**

LIDIO CARRARO, QUORUM, ENCRUZILHADO DO SUL 2005 ★★★★★

A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot along with Cabernet Franc and Tannat. Lifted, expressive berry aroma. Dense, chewy palate of ripe bramble, liquorice and firm tannins. Drink now–2015. **N/A UK; www.lidiocarraro.com**

MIOLO, LOTE 43 CABERNET-MERLOT, VALE DOS VINHEDOS 2004 ★★★★★

Showing some age, with savoury leather and rich, ripe plum compote. Whack of US oak, but the big fruit matches it. Has French consultant Michel Rolland's silky-smooth international stamp. Drink now–2012. **£19.99; DrO**

PIZZATO, RESERVA CABERNET SAUVIGNON, VALE DOS VINHEDOS 2004 ★★★★★

Inky but fresh blackberry nose, minerals and mint. Eucalypt and dark chocolate palate with lovely balance, structure and purity of dark fruit. Very well made. Drink now–2013. **N/A UK; pizzato.net**

For full details of UK stockists, see p115

Tina Gellie is Decanter's acting assistant editor