



Judges Eugénio Jardim, Master of Wine Sheri Sauter Morano, and Robin Austin pose with winner Brian White (second from left) at the Atlanta competition.

After lengthy deliberation, Brian White of The Ritz-Carlton, Atlanta, was announced as the winner. The judges praised the sommelier for both embracing the cause of Portuguese wines and demonstrating an understanding of the category that exceeded expectations. “I’m already thinking about how to work those wines [from the Dão region] in, because that was the high point for me,” said White, who organizes weekly tastings for hotel guests and oversees the restaurant’s wine list. “It’s a challenge getting Portuguese wines in, but you can see that there are lots of choices and possibilities.”

Fast Facts on Portuguese Winemaking and Viticulture

- ♣ Evidence of winemaking in Portugal dates back to 2000 B.C.
- ♣ More than 250 native grape varieties grow in the country.
- ♣ Roughly 350 miles long, Portugal has 1,115 miles of coastline and a population of 10.8 million.
- ♣ DNA studies indicate that Portugal’s native grape varieties are more closely related to the Iberian *Vitis silvestris* than the common *Vitis vinifera* vine.
- ♣ Portugal has more native grape varieties planted per square kilometer than any other country in the world.

Information sourced by Wines of Portugal.

DISSECTING DIVERSITY IN D.C.

by Kelly Magyarics

At the Washington, D.C. stop of the competition, Jardim was quick to point out that while pronunciations of Portuguese grapes and regions can be challenging, the country offers an abundance of bottles that overdeliver while partnering incredibly well with a wide range of cuisines. (By the way, those handy accent marks indicate where to place the emphasis in a word.) “Don’t worry about what’s on the label—just enjoy what’s in the glass,” he advised.

During the event, which was held at The Watergate Hotel, attendees learned that Portugal ranks among the top countries in the world in terms of wine consumption (the United States, by comparison, ranks at a rather underwhelming 53rd). It also boasts a staggering 250-plus native varieties and 1,115 miles of coastline in an area that’s



PHOTO: NICK KLEIN

The judges and New York–based winners at the Washington, D.C. competition from left to right: Sheri Sauter Morano, MW; runner-up Bruno Almeida, Wine Director for Tocqueville; winner Jonathan Eichholz, Head Sommelier at Aquavit; runner-up Arthur Hon, Assistant Wine Director at Union Square Café; and Eugénio Jardim of Wines of Portugal.

roughly a quarter of the size of California with a population similar to Los Angeles.

As for helping consumers wrap their heads around Portugal’s rare grapes, Jardim suggested the somms compare Alvarinho to Sauvignon Blanc, Encruzado to Chardonnay, and Touriga Nacional to Cabernet Sauvignon. Morano, meanwhile, walked attendees through a flight of eight wines representing various Portuguese regions: Soalheiro 2017 Alvarinho, Quinta da Lixa 2017 Pouco Comum Alvarinho, Esporão 2014 Reserva Tinto, Fita Preta 2016 Tinto, Dão Sul 2014 Quinta de Cabriz Reserva, Quinta Vale D. Maria 2015 Douro Tinto, Quinta do Vallado 2015 Touriga Nacional Douro Tinto, and Ramos Pinto Quinta da Ervamoira 10 Year Tawny Port.

“Portugal is a country of explorers—now it’s our turn to explore,” Morano mused as she elaborated on what makes Portugal such an exciting and complicated region. Its soil maps, for example, could be mistaken for a child’s scribbles: Jardim recalled a time he