

Alto Estate Port 1997

Deep, dark ruby, with a youthful purplish tint and a dense opaque centre. Complex aromas of prunes, cinnamon, pepper, nuts and coffee. Superb red and blackberry-fruit flavours follow through onto the palate, as well as dusky, smoky tones, well interwoven into the fabric of the wine. There is a slight earthiness too. The texture is silky, the fruit most accessible, the length enormous and the finish dry and alcohol-rich. A wine of huge intensity with excellent maturation potential. This port is the perfect winter warmer. It goes superbly with a selection of full-flavoured cheeses at the end of a meal, with rich desserts, a bowl of nuts or a cup of fine coffee. It should ideally be drunk from a substantial wine glass (rather than the tiddly little things often offered by hosts) and is a good, companionable drink to sip on its own. Serve at 18 °C.

variety : Shiraz | 100% Shiraz

winery : Alto Estate

winemaker : Schalk van der Westhuizen

wine of origin : Coastal

analysis : alc : 18.25 % vol rs : 917 g/l pH : 3.54 ta : 5.9 g/l va : 0.64 g/l so2 :
120 mg/l fso2 : 40 mg/l

type : Fortified **style :** Dry **wooded**

pack : Bottle

ageing : Vintage port, which is usually bottled after two years in wood and carries the vintage year, is traditionally made only in excellent years in Portugal. Not every year is a vintage one in the Douro Valley. In South Africa, any port may carry a vintage year. It simply shows the year of harvest, as in the case of the Alto 1997, and is not an indication of a "declared vintage port".

in the vineyard : It was never Alto's intention to emulate the classic wines of Portugal's Douro Valley, although the Alto Port virtually falls within the Douro parameters of sugar: between 88 and 93 g/l and alcohol: between 19 and 20 %. Instead, the cellar master wanted to produce a typical Alto wine with as much individuality as the two traditional reds.

The South African Port Producer's Association has made it their mission to encourage local producers to follow the classic Portuguese model with higher alcohols, lower sugars and using Portuguese varieties to make it more competitive with its Portuguese namesake. Market research has shown, however, that the majority of South African port drinkers still favour the older, sweeter Cape style.

The winemaker has succeeded: the 1997 vintage is neither Portuguese nor typical Cape in style. It is, indeed, an Alto Port: young and bold in character like a Cape Ruby, but one that shows great individuality.

about the harvest: The year 1997 was cool and the shiraz grapes ripened slowly. Vinification took place in the traditional manner. The grapes were hand-picked at optimum ripeness.

in the cellar : The grapes were then destalked and crushed. Colour and tannin were extracted during a short fermentation which was halted by the addition of fine brandy spirits. Wood was used judiciously. To preserve the fruit components, the winemaker opted for three years in old, 300 litre oak casks.

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