
ANTÓNIO MAÇANITA
WINEMAKER

ANTÓNIO MAÇANITA
THE SLOW WINES MAKER

Non-conformist, disruptive, difficult, audacious, restless and hot-tempered, these are some of the unconventional adjectives used to describe both António Maçanita, an oenologist and consultant, and the wines he produces. Now 39, Maçanita entered the world of wine in 2000 in the Azores, but it was only in 2004, at the age of 23, that he produced his first vintage. In these 15 years, he has **revived abandoned grape varieties**, such as Negra Mole in the Algarve and Terrantez do Pico in the Azores.
Where others are dismissive, António sees a challenge. Take the example of Branco de Tintas, the first wine he bottled in Portugal and an Alentejan protest wine developed in 2008 when CVRA decided to allow the purchase of white grapes from outside the region. Another momentous creation was Branco de Talha, in 2010, also the first of its kind in Portugal, which revived a Roman winemaking tradition and produced a subsequent renaissance. However, his revolutionary contribution is probably most visible in the Azores - Azorean grapes are today the most expensive in Portugal - where a battle is being waged today to legalise the use of aromatic vines, "beautiful vines, some over 150 years old", as Maçanita, visibly proud and enthusiastic, describes them.

In 2018, António Maçanita won Revista dos Vinhos' **"Winemaker of the Year"** award and Revista Grandes Escolhas' **"Outstanding Contribution Award 2018"**. But even his very first wine - PRETA 2004 - was a prize-winner, earning the "Trophy Alentejo" at the International Wine Challenge. In 2016, he also won the magazine Paixão do Vinho's 10th-anniversary (2006-2016) "Generation 21 Oenologist Trophy". In the same year, Revista Wine voted Azores Wine Company "Best New Producer". In 2016, the Azores Wine Company and its three shareholders won the "Project of the Year" and "Entrepreneurs of the Year" awards by 100 Maiores Empresas dos Açores, a magazine produced by Açoriano Oriental – the oldest daily newspaper in Portugal. Two years later, the Revista de Vinhos voted Vinha Centenária, by the Azores Wine Company, one of the "Best Portuguese Wines 2018". Every wine produced by António Maçanita, whether in the Alentejo, Douro or Azores, frequently wins over **90 points in Robert Parker's Wine Advocate**, the world's most important wine classification.
António Maçanita produces wines in five different regions, has created three wholly-owned production projects, supports 12 producers through his consulting firm and puts, anually, 50 signature wines on the market.



BACKGROUND

His father is from the Azores and his mother from Alentejo. Of three children, two work in the wine industry: António and Joana Maçanita. Both were born in Lisbon, "but I never felt I was from Lisbon", confesses António, as he explains that his childhood holidays in the Azores inspired a strong sense in him and his siblings of belonging in the archipelago, which would influence his future. **In São Miguel, António grew up** with a close attachment to the sea and maritime activities, from bodyboarding to spearfishing. This led him to confuse leisure with vocation and to ponder studying marine biology. It was a friend of his father's, a professor at the University of Algarve, who persuaded him to apply instead for agricultural studies. It was at this point that fate intervened. While changing his application, **António Maçanita entered the wrong course code and ended up in agro-industrial engineering.**

A passion for viticulture, a subject that might have been included on the course in his third year, was conveyed to him by Professor Rogério de Castro, one of the most renowned viticulture scientists in Portugal and a producer of vinho verde. Maçanita's enthusiasm earned him an invitation from the professor to take up a place at the Higher Institute of Agronomy (ISA), but António had other plans. The first was to fly to the Azores, where, in 2000, and while still at university, he tried to plant a vine with two fellow students: Frederico Vilar Gomes, Companhia das Quintas' current oenologist, and João Palhinha, head for many years of Esporão's exports to Brazil and today the company's Sales Manager in Brazil. He was only 20 when, after **planting their first ever vine**, a storm razed the place where it stood. "I realised that a higher force was saying: 'Come back when you're ready.'" That return would only be ten years later.

TRAVELS

In just four years, António Maçanita did **internships in California, Australia and Bordeaux**. The Napa Valley was his first destination. Maçanita was still in university when he spent four months at Merryvale Vineyards under the Cultural Agriculture Exchange Program. "When I arrived in Napa, I realised all the theory I had learnt was useless and I knew absolutely nothing." Back at college, and even though as a rugby player he was granted more flexibility, Maçanita did not receive a warm welcome from his teachers. The now winemaker and



producer has always clashed with authority and been **impatient with the status quo** in particular. Learning by rote and limiting what you study only to what you need to pass the exam was never his thing, a rebellious attitude that his teachers seldom understood. In 2002, he returned to California in the aim of working directly with Charles Thomas at the Rudd Estate winery - the oenologist at Mondavi and Opus One for 15 years, two of the wineries that revolutionised winemaking in the Napa Valley. His time with Charles Thomas was a constant learning process. Maçanita would ask a question and the answer would always come in the form of a test. It was at this time, and based on the process used at the winery where he stayed on his second trip to California, that he began to develop an approach that would come to define how he currently makes wine: **the use of gravity as opposed to pumps**. Put simply, the choice is between a more efficient and quicker process, i.e. must pumping, which can cause bruising or tearing of the very fragile grape skins, releasing unexciting aromas or structural compounds; or sending the smashed grapes to the fermentation vat by conveyor belt, i.e. by gravity. Maçanita chose gravity and that is what he uses at his wineries. “It defines my way of making wine. Is it anti-investment? Yes. But it means I can control what I do better. **I make slow wine.**”

After submitting his final coursework and finishing university, Maçanita headed to Australia where he worked at the d’Arenberg winery for five months, voted one of the most successful Australian wineries several times. Its owner, Chester Osborn, is the fourth generation of the owning family and has also been proclaimed personality of the year on just as many occasions. There, once again, the method adopted contrasted with everything he had been taught. Nevertheless, within three weeks, he was appointed head of the night shift.

It was through an oenologist he met in Australia, Jack Walton, that Maçanita managed to get his next internship in Bordeaux. As a rugby player, he arranged an internship at Château Lynch-Bages in 2003. Before that, however, António and two friends sent their CVs to **Herdade da Malhadinha.** When only Frederico Vilar Gomes was offered a place, António and the third friend travelled with him and also managed to get hired. The first step had been taken in **gaining access to the Portuguese winemaking industry.**

These four years of travelling had a major impact on António Maçanita’s modus operandi. Not just in terms, obviously, of accumulating experience and learning, but in the working structure of his own wineries. “In the US and Australia I learnt about the horizontal assigning of responsibility, while in France, where the structure is more vertical and Inflexible, I learnt about the need to socialise over good food and good wine during the harvest.”



His first wine would never have happened without the key involvement of another important person: **David Booth.** Maçanita and Booth met at a family dinner. Booth was older, a consultant for several wineries and had a philanthropic past dedicated to wildlife protection in Kenya and mine clearing in Mozambique. At their first meeting, Maçanita, ever controversial, made a provocative comment to Booth that would lead to a close friendship: “The problem with the industry are the consultants,” he remarked. Over the following months, he accompanied Booth on his visits to various estates to learn more about vineyards, viticulture and producers. In 2004, he challenged Booth to make a wine with him and, after first refusing, he eventually agreed. “I felt it was time to put my knowledge to work and we made **PRETA 2004 at Herdade da Malhadinha Nova**, a wine that is 60% mine, 40% David’s and which won the Trophy Alentejo at the International Wine Challenge”.

It was also in that year that they produced the first bottles of **Sexy Tinto**, a wine that has achieved a high profile over the years and which was very important for the start of a company which began with the trio of “friends, fools and family”, as António likes to say playfully, i.e. with some cash from his uncle, his mother, his father, etc. For three years, they vinified their creations in other people’s wineries, taking advantage of the Alentejo’s excess grapes. In 2007, they upped sticks and moved to Outeiro da Esquila, where they began producing 70 tons and ended up, ten years later, making 440. It was a time when several very important wines in Maçanita’s portfolio were produced: Fita Preta Branco 2007, Baga ao Sol 2013, Tinto Castelão 2010 and especially Vinho de Talha - **clay amphora wines** - of which they **were pioneers - especially Branco de Talha** - and prior to the current existing legislation. As mentioned above, in 2008, a Branco de Tintas was created for the first time in Portugal in protest at the exception created by the CVRA so that 20% of white grapes could be bought outside the region. The first vintage of Branco de Tintas was voted one of the Wines of the Year by Revista dos Vinhos.

It was in 2015 that the company Fita Preta began yearning after the property where it now resides. The Medieval Palace and the land where it now operates was bought in 2016 and the new building, clad throughout in 6 cm thick cork boards, was ready one year later. The palace is 14th-century but has undergone changes over the centuries, above all during the 19th when it came into the hands of the Saldanha family. The in-depth historical and archaeological research conducted on the site includes, according to António Maçanita, the first document in Évora ever to refer to the rules applied to vineyards and the wine trade, written by Martinho de Oliveira, the





owner of the palace at the time. The buildings are being restored with respect for their history and always with archaeological care. In an area which has yet to be restored, they discovered what is considered to be the largest and oldest winery in Évora.

Today, we know that all of Paço do Morgado de Oliveira was built in the 14th century, making it one of the oldest buildings in Évora. But it was not always like that, since the construction work from the 19th century meant that "little of the early manor house existed of any archaeological interest because ... one heir decided, at one unfortunate time, to embellish and modernise the palace ... entirely concealing the underlying building", according to Túlio Espanca. Maçanita, inspired by his exploratory instincts, picked away at the layers of plaster down to the stonework and discovered five Gothic arched doorways, an opening and three pairs of twinned medieval Gothic windows on the first floor, recovering the original medieval skeleton of the building and its magnitude. Also interesting is the shape of this acquisition, which is a meeting of the wishes of Dom João Saldanha and Maçanita, who followed two principles: on the one hand, the restoration of a heritage building in risk of severe degradation and, on the other, the guarantee of the building's continuation in the hands of the Saldanha family, which has owned and maintained the building almost heroically since it was built in 1306. Therefore, Fitapreta acquired 87%, with the responsibility to restore it and with the right to its exclusive use, while the family retained the rest, in a testament to continuity in what was one of the oldest and most important entailed properties in Portugal, the Morgado de Oliveira.

The ground floor contains the white wine hall and the fermentation vats, in addition to a dining, events and wine tasting area. Crossing the courtyard and entering the modern area, you come to the red wine hall and the winemaking and grape delivery area.

Fita Preta's current production in the Alentejo is **280,000 bottles a year**, of which **60% are exported.** The countries at the top of the list are Switzerland, USA, Canada, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, France, Finland and Norway. The brand's approach is to send small quantities: "Anyone who wants to sell our products has to work with small batches. They don't start with the whole portfolio but rather by understanding the wine. That way we can build a demanding and recurring market."



THE AZORES
Azores Wine Company

In five years, António Maçanita, Filipe Rocha and Paulo Machado's Azores Wine Company have raised the price of Azorean grapes to a level similar to the most expensive from the Napa Valley, Burgundy and Champagne. From **640 bottles produced in the first year, they hit 90,000** in 2018 and hope to increase that to 150,000 in 2019. Once again, Maçanita's non-conformism and desire to do things differently led him to revive a grape variety - Terrantez do Pico - that had practically disappeared from the islands in a joint project with the Agricultural Development Services (SDA) of São Miguel.
Maçanita's relationship with the Azores is a long one, having spent his holidays as a child on São Miguel and making a failed attempt to plant a vine in 2000 at the age of just 20.

It all began in 2008 when Filipe Rocha, creator of the famous food festival "10 Fest Açores" and director of the School of Tourism and Hospitality Training (EFTH), challenged Maçanita to present the students of São Miguel with a new approach to wine. His workshops and later wine dinners helped to develop the wine skills of future chefs and the pairing of wine with food. Courses finished with dinners organised by EFTH that encouraged students to create their own menus and pairings which were then presented to family, guests and customers. You could say that Filipe Rocha was trialling the beta version of what would come to be his 10 Fest Açores with students, chefs and invited oenologists. The festival, begun in 2012, celebrated the EFTH's tenth anniversary by inviting 10 chefs over 10 days to serve tasting menus with Azorean produce and in which the kitchen and serving teams were made up of students from the school. This time dedicated to the school allowed António to gravitate calmly towards the Azores. This proximity opened up the possibility of **experimenting with a grape variety - Terrantez do Pico - that he was unaware of because it had practically died out.** In total, a small patch of land was planted with shoots from the 89 vines that had been identified until then on Pico. According to Susana Mestre, head of the SDA's project to test Terrantez do Pico, "it was a grape variety that made poor wine so almost died out as a result". To António's ears, that sounded like the challenge he was looking for. He presented the SDA with a proposal: he would develop Terrantez do Pico in exchange for the right to market 80% of the production. The first Terrantez do Pico was made in 2010 at a winery measuring less than 50 m2 with just a few stainless steel vats, a wooden press and a good clean of the filthy and highly improvised machinery. "One day I asked Filipe for 400 kg of ice to cool the vats and he got hold of a truck with almost a ton of ice for chilling fish."
From 2010 to 2013 António did harvest in Azores and produced wines under the Fita Preta company. In 2013 he met Paulo Machado, from Ínsula Vinus, at the time president of CVR Açores, entered the scene. An invitation from the association Adeliaçor and EFTH to attend a marketing workshop led to the preparation of a document - Strategy to Reposition Azorean Wine - which included a historical component, a genetic component that iden-



tified Verdelho as the original grape variety and the source of Arinto dos Açores and Terrantez do Pico, and a package of free wine consultations for all producers on the island of Pico. The only person interested was Paulo Machado. So Maçanita phoned him to ask if he wanted to produce a wine together. It was in Machado's winery, where they produced important wines with other grape varieties for the market, such as Arinto dos Açores and Verdelho o Original, that they slowly **began to put the Azores on the map.**

In 2014, Filipe Rocha joined the duo and together they created the Azores Wine Company and began negotiations to rent 32 hectares of land on Pico. Later, they bought around 50 hectares of vines and began another project in partnership to revive another roughly 40. In total, over 4 years, the company revived 125 hectares of vines on the island of Pico. Using their different talents, the three partners of the Azores Wine Company completely changed the winemaking landscape on Pico. As an example, in 2004, Pico's vineyard landscape was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list and up until the arrival of the Azores Wine Company in 2014, roughly 250 hectares of vines had been revived on the island. Just five years after the Azores Wine Company was created, the island had managed to **save over 650 hectares**, reaching 1,000 hectares of planted vines, around 10 times more than in 2004, but only just over 15% of the area that existed in the past and which made the island's wines famous.

In the future, there is much more in the pipeline for the Azores. To start with, completion of the building of the winery, in November 2019, to create premium white wines and the conditions for wine tourism. A pair of Portuguese architects are working with two fellow British architects to develop a project that fits into the surrounding environment and complies with the restrictions related to the World Heritage status.
In the meantime, the Azores Wine Company is concentrating on achieving recognition and a clear legal framework for the history and culture of aromatic wine. These vines are 150 years old and have a great deal of potential because they are under-exploited and, if developed and well cared for, could represent a revolution that could greatly benefit the Azorean producer. In 2014, the Azores Wine Company launched a wine that was later removed from the market: **Isabella, A Proibida**. Its description read: "Queen Isabella was the determined saviour of the vines and wine of the islands, ensuring their continuation until today after the European wine bight in the 19th century. To many, it is not wine! To us, it is culture, folklore and part of our customs. This "Isabella a Proibida" is a statement of the history of the last 200 years - a wine that is elegant, aromatic, authentic and straightforward, like everything that is good in life!"
Revista de Vinhos, when presenting Maçanita with the award for **Winemaker of the Year 2018**, made the following remark: "... in a healthy balance between wines that are immediately recognised and others that are



less obvious, such as the first Branco de Talha he produced in the Alentejo In 2010, he has earned a deserving place among a new generation of oenologists. Critics should focus on the magnitude of his work in the Azores, now on Pico, where he woke up a sleepy sector and established himself as a guiding light producing terroir wines, supported by research, that have saved grape varieties in risk of extinction (such as Terrantez do Pico) of a quality we never imagined was possible on the misty islands – taut, iodinated, highly acidic and capable of evolving. He is the driving force behind the resurgence of Azorean wines and is indebted to the Azores Wine Company for confirming his credentials as a researcher, creator and innovator."

THE DOURO
Maçanita Irmãos e Enólogos

His first contact with the Douro was in 2006. He spent three years as a consultant at Quinta do Condoso on a wine project that never came to fruition as the producer withdrew. While working on this project he was also reviving the Lagos Cooperative in the Algarve with his partner and fellow oenologist Cláudia Favinha. It was at this time, when Maçanita was travelling between the north and south of the country, that his sister, Joana, started to help with the consultancy work in the Douro. While the plans were being abandoned in the Douro, a revolution was happening in the Algarve. António Maçanita and Cláudia Favinha were introducing methods at the cooperative that were not universally accepted - such as throwing away grapes that were not good enough to make wine with - which even led to riots. But it was thanks to the oenologist's unconventional work that the Algarve made it back into João Paulo Martins' renowned guidebooks, after a 10-year absence. It was also he, fascinated by rejected grape varieties and genetic diversity, **who bottled the first Negra Mole**, an indigenous variety that is unique and classified as the country's second oldest. In 2010, however, João Alves, from Quinta João Clara, who Maçanita worked alongside in the Algarve, died and he gradually detached himself personally from the region, leaving the work to Cláudia Favinha and, later, Joana, giving him time to return to the Douro in 2011 to begin a project with his sister. **The wines are made with four hands**, but some, though produced jointly, reflect their individual preferences, whims and personal visions. Gouveio by Joaninha, for example, which is a fresh and mineral wine from vines planted at 700 metres altitude, while Malvasia Fina, by António, made from vines planted at the same altitude and in the same town, Vila de Poiares, is an obscure wine that embraces the trend for this grape to oxidize. "**When you try our wines, you discover a different Douro**", says António. "Whether it's a Maçanita Branco, which is a balance of old and new vines, or As Olgas, a wine made from vines that are almost 100 years old."
Today, the vines in the Maçanita project are scattered across the three sub-regions of the Douro. Baixo Corgo is home to Malvasia Fina, Viosinho and Gouveio, the Douro Superior to Códega do Larinho, and Cima Corgo, near Pinhão, to tintas, Touriga Nacional, Sousão and a batch of vines over 80 years old. The wines of the Maçanita Vinhos are therefore a reflection of the diversity of the Douro terroir which expresses the personality of each of the siblings. **The Douro winery today produces 70,000 bottles a year.**

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