

# Renaissance of Port wine

BY KELLY VILLASUSO

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Portugal rides the rising tides of popularity, demand for one of its centuries-old, national drinks — port, Oporto, or vinho do Porto — is surging, too. According to a recent study of the global fortified wine market by global research company, Technavio, call for this rich, grapes-turned-liquefied-Portuguese-indulgence has positioned it as one of the forerunners in the market today.

Why the fervor for “red Portugal?” It seems millennial wine drinkers and their favorite mixologists have figured out port should not be relegated to their grandparents any longer. Their desire for new, premium wines has expanded and is now driving the port market, too. From the Port Classic and the Portuguese

Sour, to port on the rocks or straight up, the contemporary thirst for this sweet drinkable treat seems unquenchable.

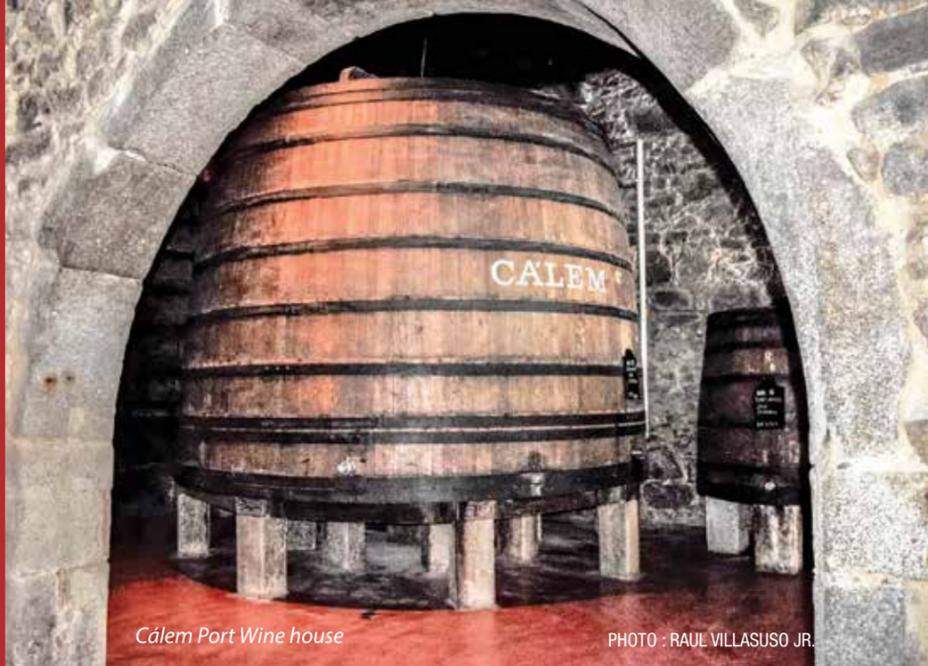
So, on my recent trip to the motherland of port, I had the opportunity to go right to the source to try to get ahead of the young’uns and turn my knowledge and my palate from that of a tawny tyro into a Colheita connoisseur. Here is a snapshot of what I learned in the mecca for vinho do Porto.

## PORT IS PORTUGAL IN A GLASS

Portuguese wine has been made from grapes off vines in the Douro valley for more than 2,000 years according to historians. The Douro valley appellation is the third-oldest in the world behind Chianti, Italy, and Tokaj-Hegyalja, Hungary, and is home to more than 100 grapes (castas)



Douro Valley Port Wine Country



Cálem Port Wine house

PHOTO : RAUL VILLASUSO JR.



Port showing Kopke and Cálem locations

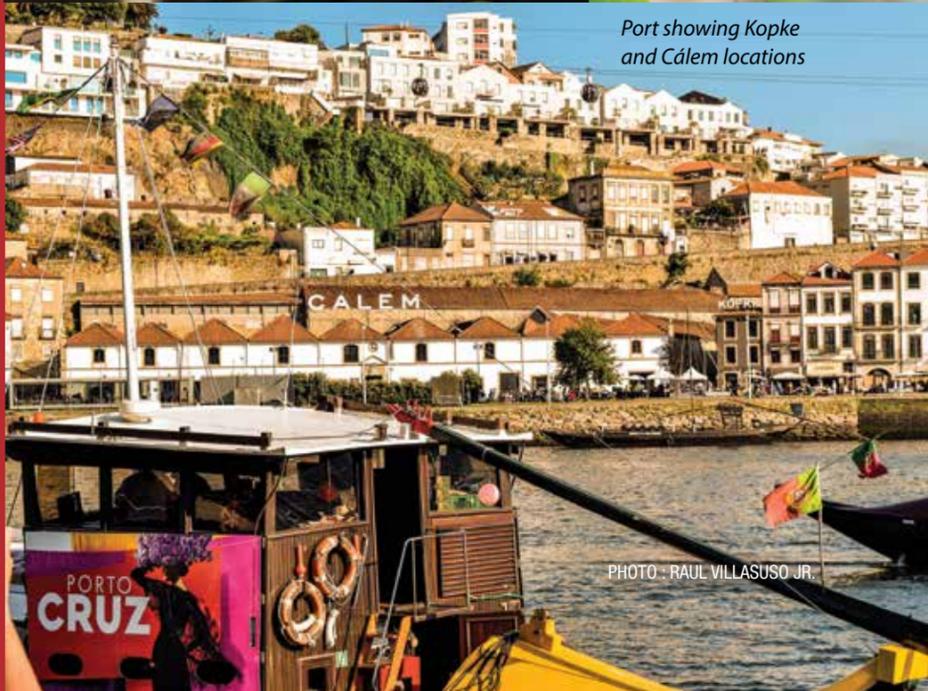


PHOTO : RAUL VILLASUSO JR.

authorized for port production, although only five are widely grown and utilized.

With such a long-standing lineage, it should be clear that port is of Portuguese descent. However, with names like Cockburn, Taylor, Graham and Croft, it is easy to think that port is a British export. But the locals will tell you fervently that port is Portuguese through and through — with a bit of influence from the Romans, Greeks, and, yes, most definitely British, over its lengthy evolution. The most significant was adding a grape brandy to the wine to prevent its spoiling while shipping it to England back in the 1700s, which incidentally stopped the fermentation process and influenced how we experience robust, sweet-spirited port wines today.

### VILA NOVA DE GAIA

As Havana, Cuba, is to rum and Lima, Peru, is to pisco, Vila Nova de Gaia (“Gaia”), Portugal — the municipality directly across the Douro river from the medieval city of Oporto or Porto — is the perfect place to sip in the history, spirit and cul-

ture of Portugal ... one port house and one port at a time.

Since the early 1900s, Gaia — and, for centuries prior, Porto — has been one of the most precious of all locales in Portugal ... the place where all port makers transport their wines from the Douro valley to store and age in their respective cellars or houses. There are literally dozens upon dozens of cellars lining the narrow streets of Gaia.

At first glance across the Douro river from Porto or from up close on its banks in Gaia, the port houses appear to be stacked together like building blocks, emboldening you on your pilgrimage to taste every port like the little engine that could. Speaking from experience, that is an optical illusion and port touring should come with a warning: Caution! Many port lodges are farther than they appear, especially after a tippie or two.

traversing the steep, winding ascent over beautiful (but occasionally dicey) Portu-

guese pavement (*calçada portuguesa*) requires comfortable shoes, clear vision, and endurance. In other words, strategically plan your tours and/or pace your port partaking because going downhill can be a little challenging ... even without port goggles.

### ELDERS STILL KNOW BEST

At the Douro river’s edge, between the larger cellars of Cálem and Sandeman, resides the grand dame of port, house of Kopke. Demurely housed in a three-story building butting up against the bustling *taberna do Manel*, it’s easy to walk right past this port wine institution — if you didn’t know better or if you somehow missed “the Oldest Port Wine house” denoted above its door.

Being that I was taught to respect my elders, I dedicated my afternoon to paying homage to the eldest port brand in the world (established in 1638) and the second oldest business in all of Portugal. After visiting other cellars, I found no “bells and whistles” at Kopke.

there was no cellar tour nor interactive programming. After tasting some of the finest ruby, tawny (white and red), and vintage ports in the world poured from the iconic, hand-painted black Kopke bottles, nestled in an elegant tasting room with views of Porto across the river, it became very clear why: At Kopke, port is the star and the show.

For a more high-tech tour, however, you can walk up the road to renowned Taylor Fladgate. Their new program is very interactive and their cellar was beautiful.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Villasuso is an independent travel writer and travel consultant with Premier Tours & Travel. Premier Tours & Travel is a travel agency recognized for designing custom travel itineraries for our clients, such as to Portugal, and a tour operator recognized for our small group, enriching cultural and chef- or sommelier-led experiences. Call today 843.237.9903 or Kelly@premiertravels.com.