



Basic Juice Article **Indestructible Wine**

by: *Beau Jarvis*

Everything shiny and new seems to break. I'm in the midst of a kitchen remodel. Within one day after the new cabinets were installed, someone scratched them. Later, I stood admiring the fabulous cork flooring and noticed it was scratched all to hell by an overeager appliance installer. If I see any more damage, I'm afraid I will begin pulling out my hair – by the handful.

Then there are my poor wine bottles, all wearing dusty coats of drywall particles. I'm starting to wonder if, like me, my wine will be permanently tainted by this experience.

After the cabinets were finally repaired and re-installed, I began rummaging around and unpacking the dozens of boxes containing kitchen items. In what was formerly the dining room (now a graveyard of stacked kitchen boxes), I found my bottle of 5 year Madeira wine. It was dumped, unceremoniously upside down in a box with olive oil and tuna fish cans. The box had been sitting in an unforgiving sun-baked location on the floor for well over a month. I almost threw out the half empty bottle, but decided to have a *schluckl*. It still tasted grand. A tart sweetness bathed my tongue while a heady, roasted almond aroma filled my nose. My Madeira was neither broken nor tainted! To celebrate, I had a second glass. After my third, I began to wonder what makes Madeira so hearty and downright indestructible.

Many wine drinkers may not have heard of Madeira, let alone had a chance to taste it. Madeira has been around for quite some time. It's rumored to have been G.W.'s favorite wine (by G.W., I mean George Washington, of cherry tree axing fame). Madeira is also said to have been present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, although it didn't get to sign (that John Hancock was quite the space hog).

This age old wine is made on the island of Madeira, a Portuguese property in the Atlantic Ocean, north of the Canary Islands. None other than Prince Henry the Navigator came up with the bright idea of growing wine grapes on Madeira Island in the 15th Century. Soon, Prince Henry and his band of undoubtedly merry men began sailing their prized wine all around the globe.

Like Archimedes skinny-dipping in his tub and splashing upon the principle of displacement, Madeira wine traders serendipitously noticed how much better their unsold Madeira tasted after bouncing around in their ships' holds for months on end. One bright Portuguese soul made the connection between *estufa* (the unintentional semi-cooking of Madeira that occurred under the steamy, sweaty, sweltering conditions of a ship's belly) and increased tastiness. Indeed, *madeirized* wine became the drink of choice for pirates, colonists and powdered wig wearing gentlemen around the world. In no small part due to its phoenix-like emergence after a journey through fiery, unforgiving conditions that would have destroyed most any other wine.

Sadly, nowadays, bottles of Madeira lie quietly in lonely wine shop corners gathering dust. On the bright side, the lack of popularity means most Madeira has an affordable price tag. Perhaps a Madeira renaissance is in order.

How does it taste? It truly is one of the most unique wines around. Let's begin with Madeira's appearance. It's often described as having an "orangey-brown" color. Sometimes it appears coppery, while other times it looks like liquid rust. To me, Madeira's appeal lies in the aroma. Smoke, toffee, wood, caramel and citrus all come to mind as I poke around a glass with my nose. There are both dry and sweet styles of Madeira. Both are delicious. The sweet versions are the most common. Unlike many dessert wines, Madeira doesn't taste the slightest bit like cough syrup. It has a crisp, tangy-woody flavor that I believe everyone needs to experience at least once in life (if only so you can use the word, "tangy-woody" in a sentence). In my opinion, Madeira is best savored by itself. If you happen to own a velvet smoking jacket, then a Madeira drinking session is the ideal occasion on which to wear it. If you are currently *sans* velvet smoking jackets, drink your Madeira with almond biscotti. Remember to sip Madeira. It is a fortified wine meaning additional alcohol is added. Thus, Madeira-chugging is not recommended. Locally, there is a fine selection of Madeira. For starters, I recommend two: Blandy's five-year-old Sercial Madeira is dry in style. It's tangy and nutty. Serve it either chilled or at room temperature. This Madeira is \$20, but the bottle will last quite a while. And, as I said earlier, Madeira is virtually indestructible. This means once the bottle is open, you don't have to worry about your wine going bad. For a sweeter style, try Blandy's five-year-old Malmsey (also \$20). It's darker, richer and makes a fine dessert-in-a-glass. Go on, dust off a bottle of Madeira at the wine store and discover how good a cooked, indestructible wine can be. *Saude!*

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