

Ep 188: Exploring Bairrada: Wine Region Insights & the New Wine Book 'How to Drink Wine' with Author and Presenter Tom Surgey (Part 1)



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back to another exciting episode where today I am welcoming one of the UK's most dynamic and certainly energetic wine presenters, Tom Surgey. Now, you might know Tom from his work with the Three Wine Men or his regular appearances on ITV's Love Your Weekend with Alan Titchmarsh. He's also been on ITV's This Morning.

Now, Tom has just returned from an incredible trip to Portugal. And in this episode, we're going to be diving into all things Bairrada. Now we'll explore the sparkling wines from this region, the unique Baga grape and the standout wineries that make this region so special.

Plus, we'll get a sneak peek into Tom's soon to be released wine book. But that's not all. We'll also be discussing the annual vine cycle, focusing on the flowering stage, which is currently happening in the Northern hemisphere.

Tom's going to be sharing insights on some of the famous biodynamic wineries that you may not know are practising biodynamics. And make sure you stick around until the end as we reveal the correct way to open up your sparkling wines and a little bit of healthy debate on the art of sabrage.

Now, if you're feeling thirsty, do go across to [Wickhams Wine](#), my incredible sponsor of this season, who genuinely are talented at picking very tasty wines. Use the code "EATSLEEP10" for 10% off your first order. You'll find the link to their website in my show notes, alongside a link to the transcript so you can follow along. But for now, wine friends, pour yourself a glass of wine and let's talk Portuguese grape varieties.

Janina Doyle 00:02:26 My question to you first of all is, do you think that we need to create a warning for the listeners that this is going to be extra, like extra HD?

Tom Surgey 00:02:35 Yeah, like loud. I think, yeah, there's two, two quite high energy people having a chat, isn't there? So, this is one you probably want to listen to when you're jogging or something like that. You know, it's like, it's like the EDM of the wine world, isn't it? It's high tempo stuff. It's going to be good.

Janina Doyle 00:02:51 Okay. Everybody listening, please take a deep breath. Turn down your speakers slightly and here we go. Tom, we've got to start the podcast the way we always do, which is, was there a wine moment? What happened to get you into wine?

Tom Surgey 00:03:11 Great question. Do you know what? It horrifically does link back to my book, which is coming out at the end of August, 'How to Drink Wine', available everywhere. The reason I mention it is, there's part of the book where I talk about that and talk about one guy called Sancho.

And so, he's Portuguese. He was the assistant general manager at the Ivy, the original when I worked there when I was in my late teens, early twenties. And he was the guy who I was really into beer. I've been into beer for ages. I was really good at beer from a very young age. Disgustingly young age.

And then, I started working in some cocktail bars and really kind of got into whiskey and got into a kind of flavour through that. And then Sancho, when we were sort of on the floor at The Ivy, he used to sort of say, "If you're into whiskey, mate, you're going to love wine. Wine is so going to be your thing."

And I think, I sort of said along the lines of like, look, Sancho, it just got nothing to do for me. I've got no idea about this stuff. And then kind of just over months of after services or mid shift sort of saying, "Oh, look, we've just poured this. It's Bordeaux. Try some of that. We've just had a bit of this. It's great. Try a little bit of that."

Just little dribs and drabs and samples, Sancho just got this kind of, he gave me the perspective on this is amazing. Like the range of flavours, the range of places, cultures, everything that comes into it. And he taught me. He taught me some hilarious things, some of which are probably completely unmentionable now, but he was a brilliant, brilliant human being and still is. Sounds like it's posthumous, it's not.

And so, that was kind of it. It was on restaurant floors. Once I realised that actually there's something really cool here, there was this sudden recognition of, "Hang on, if I get really into this, I can travel about, I can taste more of the stuff. I can go as deep into this as I ever want to and it's going to be a constant party of connecting me with people and tasting new things and new foods."

It's intrinsically linked with food, obviously. I've just never got off that merry-go-round of just having the best time going around the place, enjoying it and meeting people. It's awesome. So, that's how I got into it.

Janina Doyle 00:05:17 And so, we actually met when you were representing an English winery, Ridgeview, and you were showing me around the vineyards. Did you go from working in The Ivy to English wine?

Tom Surgey 00:05:30 Yeah, that's literally what I did. So, I worked in The Ivy and a bunch of other restaurants. And then in the last few years of doing that, I was in my early 20s – I was probably at 23, sort of early mid 20s or whatever. And I, having really got into wine, started doing lots of my WSETs and things. I think I was just starting the diploma when I finished there. Had started helping write the wine lists.

So, I was going on trade trips with The Ivy and we're kind of selecting wines and doing that for there and a little bit in Annabel's cellars with Richard Rotie over there and Sheekey's occasionally that sort of thing, just sort of doing bits and bobs.

And then, in doing that, I kind of reckoned this whole idea of this is amazing. I want to spend my whole time doing this. I love hospitality. I still love restaurants. If my family decided I was awful and sort of kicked me out of the house tomorrow, I would buy a pub. That would be the first thing I did.

But with that, I sort of wanted to do more and more in wine. And I thought that probably the best thing I could do in wine, the most useful thing would be to take the empathy of having selected wines for wine lists and built wine lists and try to go and work with a producer to then take them out to the trade and do exactly the opposite, introduce that producer to people who were making wine lists.

And so I wrote a letter, literally a letter to Mike, who owned Ridgeview, who was the founder of Ridgeview at the time, and to Maira, his daughter, and just said, "Look, I'm Tom, I do this. I've never ever worked with a winery before. I love your wines. I actually grew up half an hour away or 20 minutes away in Lewes from where you are. And I'm thinking about getting out of town and doing this. It might be a really stupid idea, but I don't know if that might be something you were interested in."

And they hilariously came back to me and said, "Yeah, do it." So, I bought a pair of Welly boots for the interview because I was like, I want to show them that I could walk around a vineyard or whatever. And then just went and had a meeting and just had a chat and they were awesome. And they immediately said, "Yeah, let's do it."

I think I was the first sort of non-family member at Ridgeview who had been brought in specifically to sort of do some sales stuff. They were right at a point where they were producing a bit more wine. They'd been making wine for 20 years by that point and they were really beginning to want to get out to the market. So, the timing just aligned really well.

And I was there for six and a half years, something like that, and became sales director. It was an amazing, I would say, mutually really great role because I got to learn as they got to learn how to take these things out to the trade. And I got an enormous amount of experience and like anything, got to be like a big fish in a little pond in some ways, because the English industry is so small. It's growing, but it's still weenie.

And so, it was a really fortunate thing. I think all around, it was highly successful for all of us. We loved it. And then one day, it was a really nice sunny day, the sommelier from Beast came down to come and say hello...

Janina Doyle 00:08:15 That was me!

Tom Surgey 00:08:17 Yeah. It was awesome. And we had a really nice time. And then working English wine is awesome as well you know. You've been in space as well. Actually, our trajectory into English wine is pretty similar, right? You went from on trade, buying wines, sommelier stuff to working in English wine as well.

Janina Doyle 00:08:34 I mean, here I am, I guess, presenting. I'm the presenter of this podcast and actually your wonderful personality has skyrocketed you onto the stage working with the likes of Oz Clarke and Jolly Olly, which is pretty fun, right?

Tom Surgey 00:08:58 It's an enormous amount of fun and it really is. Thank you. I mean, the work you're doing and presenting is just fantastic as well. You communicate so brilliantly with people and really connect, which is awesome.

It was something that started when I was at Ridgeview and I was presenting something and I think Oz was there and he came up afterwards and Olly Smith and said, "That was quite good. Would you do some master classes? I've got this thing called Three Wine Men. We need someone to do a couple of master classes around it. Would you ever be up for that?" And I was like, "Yeah, of course, that'd be great. Let's do that."

And then that went from there. I think Tim and Oz snuck into the back of one of those while I was presenting or whatever and that was probably like, "Oh, that stuff's got a serious moment." And then, I think afterwards they just didn't think it was rubbish, which was great. And so, there was a point where a year or so into having done quite a few master classes, they said, "Look, we want to grow this."

They invited me to get involved formally. That was awesome. It's been a major part of me doing it. And I still do huge amounts with Three Wine Men. And it's not just me, there's Susie Atkins who's involved as well. Luma Montero regularly jumps in and does things as well. She's wicked.

And so, there's some really lovely people there and they've been so supportive. And then from that, I now do lots of quite regular telly with ITV, and I've done bits on this morning. I do very regularly 'Love Your Weekend' with the brilliant Alan Titchmarsh, which is hilarious and very funny and just awesome sprawling weekend Sunday morning show, the last 20 minutes of which is the longest drink segment on terrestrial telly.

So, we get to taste cocktails and wines and chat and see what celebrities think about a range of things. It is such a broad spectrum of ideas that we kind of put across. I'm very grateful for doing it because it is one of those TV segments that there is actually quite a lot of time. And it's a rare thing now where you do get to discuss the wine a bit and throw opinion around and then have a bit of fun with it. And so, I love it. Yeah, that's that story. That is that.

Janina Doyle 00:11:01 That's you. And so of course, you've got to – It's such a tough life that we both have, which is travelling to these wine regions so that we keep on learning, so we can bring it to the listeners.

So, you've recently been in Portugal. So, you went to, we're going to talk in this episode about Bairrada. So, what is special about the Bairrada wine region?

Tom Surgey 00:11:27 Yeah, travel is a good thing, isn't it? Travel is amazing and travel has been, I think, increasingly important in the world. Now, we've got quite polarised views and politics and all this sort of stuff going on. I think the more people can travel and get out there and not do it in a really swanky way either, but go and actually go and see.

I mean, the joy of the wine world is you're basically going to see farmers and you're going to see people and eat really traditional dishes in pretty rustic environments and it's not all five-star hotels. There is occasionally, if you're lucky, on a press trip, a five-star hotel. But actually, that's by far my least favourite bit of the trip. The whole thing I want is authenticity. And so, going to places is great.

Bairrada, enormously, like enormously delivered on that. So, I got back yesterday and I flew into Porto. So, that's where you'll go if you want to visit Bairrada. You fly into Porto, which most things are up for debate, but it's officially the law. It is pretty much the greatest city on the planet, as far as I can see.

I love Porto and I'll hear arguments for other places being amazing, but Porto is objectively the best because it's just the food scene is amazing. The people are hilarious and really, really welcoming. There's history, there's culture, there's art. And crucially, whatever way out of Porto you go, other than into the Atlantic, you're stepping into some of the greatest wine regions on the planet.

And you're also crucially stepping into wine regions that are evolving, getting better, that are in a really interesting kind of period of their development. If you fly into Bordeaux and you go in any direction from Bordeaux, you're kind of getting the same stuff, right? And whereas if you fly into Porto, you've got Vinho Verde to the north, this freshness, this leanness, this wonderful vibrant wine scene.

If you go inland, you go down the Douro river itself and you're into kind of the amazing Douro, all of which is good. If you head south from Porto and you drive for about 45 minutes or an hour, depending on how long it takes you to get over the bridge, keeping on the Atlantic coastline, you end up in Bairrada.

Bairrada is this quite flat, very kind of green, quite verdant, pretty chilly by general Portuguese standards because it is so Atlantic-influenced wine region that is rustic old farmhouses. It's relatively low population. It's not a big sort of pumping kind of city. I don't know what the nightlife is like in Bairrada. I'm sure they do have a really good time.

You go down there and it's not one of these wine regions that everywhere you look has these mountains kind of rising up. I was in Dão and that is the case in Dão. We'll talk about Dão another time. But the thing with Bairrada is everything's influenced by the coastline. The soil is sandy. Like, really sandy in places. And then, the other bit of it is kind of clayey and limestone. It's quite claggy, quite staunch soil types is the thing.

And these things, they're a little gentle rolling hills, but there's vineyards planted all over. And the vineyards are on multiple different aspects of these little shallow hills, but it's all kind of quite flat and quite plain-y.

The crucial thing about Bairrada is the weather. It's relatively cool. It does get warm, but it's kind of cool for Portugal. It's up in the north of Portugal, so it is a little bit cooler unless you go inland. The grape varieties there, like all grape wine regions in Portugal, are indigenous. They're properly of their place. They haven't travelled enormously.

That's one of the reasons I enjoy visiting the country so much is you go to Bairrada and there's a completely different set of grape varieties to anywhere else that I've just mentioned regions-wise.

And the even more fun bit is because it's so regionally distinct, quite often you'll get grape varieties like Cerceal, where there's the same name in different wine regions for completely different grapes, and sometimes you've got the same name for completely different grapes as well.

So, it's a completely wild thing, and you find that with Arinto and a few other grapes there. The grapes in Bairrada, the first one you've got to know is called Baga. It's great fun to say. A lot of humour was derived from Baga and continues to be, which is awesome. But Baga is, if you read, I don't know, if you read like Jancis's Oxford companion to wine or whatever from 2003 or something like that, one of the early ones, they'll talk about, "Oh, there's this thing called Baga there. It's got thick skins. It's meaty. It's really intense. It's tannic. It's quite a challenging wine."

And actually, that is genuinely still the case actually in lots of ways. Sometimes Baga can be quite a joyless experience. It's a pretty dry meaty thing. But then when you start reading further Oxford Companions to Wine from Jancis, you'll notice there's this little trend and I'm only using that as the example because there's a general trend that people have gone, but there's this bloke called Luis Pato who he's doing it a bit differently.

He's squishing the grapes a bit less hard. He's kind of giving it less time with the skins. He's making it slightly more perfumed, gentle expressions, trying to avoid the tannins a bit. I was really lucky I got to go and see Luis and we went to go and have some suckling pig for lunch, which is, I mean, literally the only thing that you should have when you're in Bairrada.

And Luis is like this one man force that has really led this development of the region. And now definitely, 15-20 years after that point where people began to realise Baga could be made more elegantly, is really still the leading light in this grape being actually a lot more inviting than it used to be.

If it's gently pressed, it tastes quite like Pinot Noir. It's like a slightly rugged kind of Pinot Noir, maybe a little bit like cool climate Grenache, but quite intense still in terms of flavour. There's always a bit of forest floor kind of character kicking about with it. Black fruit, really nice stuff.

And then in warmer vintages, it can get a bit Nebbiolo-y with that lovely perfume and just this little gently tarry kind of thing going on, as well as this lovely black and red fruit. And the tannins are pretty staunch. But yeah, going back to the pork, you just got to have a load of pork on you at all points really. That's the number one rule. It's to keep a suckling pig in a bag or something or in every pocket. And then you can just keep going with the Baga forever because it is just glorious.

Yeah, that's Baga. There's a load of other things down there. My favourite white and the whites for an enormous discovery because Baga, the red is the main kind of thing that we hear about. Favourite white, I think, is Bical. There's a grape variety called Bical down there.

Bical, I found beautifully fresh, like really great acidity, but with lovely kind of structure, really good kind of broad-shouldered kind of ruggedness, this kind of stature to the wines that then carries all of this lovely kind of green orchard fruits to it, maybe a bit of peachiness. Sometimes they oak it a little bit and they often use a lot of concrete tanks down there, which gives a bit of oxidation, but not smoky toastiness sort of thing. And I found the Bical wines really, really, really exciting. And then there's another great called Maria Gomes.

Janina Doyle 00:18:37 Yeah.

Tom Surgey 00:18:38 And Maria Gomes is a good example. Do you like Maria Gomes? Is this the thing?

Janina Doyle 00:18:41 Yeah, I was waiting patiently. You were describing all of this beautifully, but I'm like, this is the Portuguese Riesling, as they say. And funny enough, just because I have lots of random stories, I first tasted Maria Gomes or Fernão Pires as it's also called.

Tom Surgey 00:19:00 Yeah, Fernão Pires.

Janina Doyle 00:19:01 I am going to bastardise these Portuguese words, so I'll try and say very little.

Tom Surgey 00:19:09 As am I. No, I'm going to bastardise them completely. I called it Fernão Pires forever as well. And then I went to Dão last year and got told off by Dão Winemaker who was like, it's not Fernão Pires, it's Fernão Pires. It's Fernão Pires. And so, apparently it's Pires. That's the fun bit of Portuguese language. There's a lot of shh going on. There's a lot of this.

Janina Doyle 00:19:31 So, Fernão Pires, I first tasted in South Africa. There's an amazing producer that makes The Blank Bottle wines. And it was the most aromatic orange blossom lemon lime zest zing. And I was like, what is this? Anyway, that's my part. I don't want to say any other words incorrectly. Over to you again.

Tom Surgey 00:19:55 It's great. Peter at Blank Bottle makes extraordinary Fernão Pires. And in that environment, it's richer and it's fuller, right? It's got these lovely, quite Riesling aromatics. Absolutely bang on. And it's got like a Riesling or Viognier oily texture to it sometimes, which is really just lovely.

Bairrada, much cooler than where Peter's making it out in South Africa. But what goes on with Maria Gomes, as this is again, this is the really fun thing, two really complicated names for grapes. Both sound like people could easily be interchanged for children's names if anyone's thinking about that. Exactly the same grape variety.

And so, the Maria Gomes in Bairrada, it's much leaner, it's much fresher, it's got a lot of acidity, it is quite Riesling-esque. They make a lot of fizz from it. This is the second you arrive in Bairrada, they will start telling you, look, with not just a sparkling wine region.

I don't want people to think about us as a sparkling wine region which, coming from the UK, I was sort of saying to them, I don't think about you as a sparkling wine region. I know that historically you've made lots of sparkling, but we think about Baga. If you Google Bairrada, the first thing you hear about is Baga, but in Portugal, that's the whole thing. When you think Bairrada, you think fizz.

And traditional method Fizz, it is some of the most extraordinary, really interesting fizz made in the world, but the Portuguese have an enormously dry palate for sparkling wine. So, there's this whole thing in Champagne or in English wine where you get sort of slightly trendy winemakers kind of going, we don't use a lot of sugar in our dosage, actually. It's nought percent. That's what we do.

And they kind of make it this sort of specialist though. It's not for everybody. You won't be able to have two glasses of that stuff. It's really quite specialist. And yeah, you go to Bairrada and the idea of putting dosage into a traditional method of sparkling wine is mind blowing, like absolutely mind blowing.

And so, they're all super, super dry. So, the first one you do have strips of the enamel from your teeth. And then after that, you get used to it and they're bracing really extraordinary wines. And again, ideal for food, really lovely as an aperitif. They get particularly good after about three or four years in the bottle.

I did find a lot of the fizz, the traditional type of fizz from Bairrada in the year or two after it's been released is pretty tense, pretty staunch stuff. But actually, when you start tasting stuff from late teens now, the 18, 19 vintage of things where they've had quite a few years in the bottle, they were amazing. The aromatic complexity to them was awesome. And the fizz was good. Goes very well with the pork again, all roads lead back to suckling pig. That is the thing.

I came home last night and you sort of have to detox yourself after a trip to Bairrada. And so, we did some pork steaks on the barbecue for the kids and lots of vegetables. So, it was like a little bit of pork and a lot of vegetables and some rice was the idea just because I think when you've had that much pork in your system for that long, you can't just stop it immediately is the thing. A couple of non-alcoholic beers and a small amount of pork and lots of vegetables just to ease off of it. Might have sort of a slice of ham today and then it will be fine.

Janina Doyle 00:23:01 Bless you. Now you mentioned sparkling and actually, if I'm right, I think about 50% of Portugal's sparkling does come from this region, hence why they were mentioning it to you. But you said that the sparkling, a lot of it's made with Maria Gomes, but I thought a lot of it was also made with the Baga red grape. So, is it just both? Is there one more than the other that you noticed?

Tom Surgey 00:23:25 They definitely make some, they make it with Maria Gomes. They definitely make it, they have quite a few Rosés. They do make lots of Rosé with Baga. They do make white Baga as well. So, as in sparkling Baga, you can like Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier and Champagne, you can gently press it. You can extract clear juice. The colour from Baga can drop out quite easily in fermentations as well.

So, they sort of said you can get pretty much a white wine from Baga pretty easily. There's a bunch of other things in there. You know, there's a great variety called Cercialinho which is so much fun to say.

Luis Pato's dad was the first person ever to plant it out of a nursery. It's a cross between Riesling and Cercial from somewhere – one of the Cercials. In fact, I know it's Cercial from Madeira and Alvarinho. And so, it's sort of super zingy, lemon sherbet, sort of electric, 2 o'clock in a nightclub, sort of smoking on terrace, sort of get your back on your feet, sort of situation-wide. And lovely.

They make some fizz with that bit. A bit of Bical goes into it. Like all good things in Portugal, there's often a bit of blending that goes on. The other big discovery I had, and there are other producers, you could be forgiven with my chat so far thinking there are no other producers than Luis Pato, but we'll just talk about Luis for a minute and then we can talk about some others.

But the Pet-Nat, Maria, Luis' daughter – one of his daughters, who was with us, makes some Pet-Nat with him now under the Luis Pato label. And they're beautiful. They've got a duck on the label because Pato is a duck and so the duck is his thing.

And actually, the Pet-Nats were extraordinary and they're made with no additional sugar. It's almost ancestral, right? Where it's like one continuous fermentation bottled it just before it finishes and gets to dryness. And they were really lovely and the best of those probably were Maria Gomes, but there were some lovely ones coming from Baga and things as well. So, yeah, really cool. So, it's not just traditional methods. There's a bit of Pet-Nat. Like everywhere, they're experimenting, they're playing, they're doing some fun things.

Janina Doyle 00:25:25 It is worth mentioning, Luis, and I was going to say Luis, I always call him Luis Pato. So, here we go, Luis.

Tom Surgey 00:25:31 Luis Pato is great. Look, the Portuguese are very forgiving of our pronunciations. They get that it's hard. I got in the car and picked up from the airport the other time, and not this time, but the time before, and the guy, the person that was taking me around said, "Oh, how's your Portuguese?" And I was like, "I'm not very good at it. Really, I think I can listen to lots of that. I'm beginning to get it." They were like, "How's your pronunciation?" I was like, "I think I'm actually the lovely guy from Wines of Portugal always says I'm quite good at my pronunciation, actually."

He was like, "All right, we're going for lunch over here. What does that say?" And I was like, "Matasinhos..." "No, that's Tom. That is Matosinhos." And I was like, "Okay, right." So, I've completely fucked it on the first word that he wanted me to pronounce. And so, they're very forgiving about it. They're very forgiving about it.

Janina Doyle 00:26:14 Good. Well, I'm glad then I feel better about whatever the hell comes out of my mouth. But it is worth mentioning because like you said, Baga has been almost rediscovered because of Luis.

But then his daughter, this is my question to you. So, Filipa Pato, which is obviously another winery and it's run by his daughter, she does things in slightly different ways. So, I'm wondering, did you, I think, this is my interpretation. Now tell me if you discovered differently. That Luis was always much more about de-stemming so that it wasn't as grippy, but also he would put things in a lot of French oak barrels.

Whereas actually, Filipa, she goes over to again a much more kind of even leaner, lighter, fresher style. There's, I think, again, the same with Dirk Niepoort, who just seems to be everywhere in that part of Portugal. Did you manage to taste some of Filipa's Baga wines with Luis's?

Tom Surgey 00:27:11 Do you know what? I didn't own this particular trip. So, I actually had zero Filipa Pato wine and she's an amazing producer. I like her a lot. I buy a lot of her wines. I buy both wines from both of them, and we can talk about that if you like.

But yeah, Filipa's, she used to work with Luis and as does Maria now. And at a certain point a little while ago, she decided actually that I'm gonna go and do my own thing, which is great. And Luis

spoke about her really eloquently and with so much positivity. And obviously, an enormous amount of pride.

So, they are very, very close as a family. And Filipa still appears in all of the family photos, all around Luis Pato's winery and things. So they're definitely a symbiotic thing. Luis, I would say has been, as you've said, he's an enormous innovator in his own game and he would be livid if we even left a moment's suggestion that he has followed traditional processes or more French processes or whatever it might be. He is a staunchly individual in going, 'No, I don't follow anybody. That's what I do.'

But he does, he uses oak barrels. Lots of hyper oxidation is his style. So, getting lots of oxygen into wine, buffing edges down. I did it after about 10 times of him mentioning it, saying, "Luis, I think I get this, but can you explain to me what hyper oxidation is? It's obviously a really important part." And he looked at me and went, "I do nothing." And I was like, "Okay, all right, fair enough, good. That's fine."

So, that's all I can report back about Luis' hyper oxidation techniques. But it does basically mean it's stuffing smoke and cement at different points, softening the heavier energetic exuberant sides of Baga.

Filipa's definitely is more, I mean, for lack of a better word, kind of natural in her approach sort of thing. But then they're both using indigenous yeasts. Everyone in this region is, or a lot of people in this region are using indigenous yeasts. The idea of that is great.

I think the distinction between them is almost getting less and less in terms of the time. But I think Filipa's wines are more experimental, a bit more exploratory, more natural. She's doing more with biodynamics and that sort of thing.

So, in the vineyard, she is more in that direction. I don't know if she necessarily would describe herself as a biodynamic producer, but she's that way. Whereas Luis is not certified, but is pretty much organic, doesn't use any pesticides or herbicides or anything.

But that's been a bit of a journey for him, getting there and understanding that. He didn't start there and he's working that out. And arguably, it's a region that's very hard to do organics in.

Janina Doyle 00:29:41 Humid, right? A lot.

Tom Surgey 00:29:44 Super humid. Loads of wetness. Baga is a great variety as well. It gets quite a big amount of bunches and they're very dense. So, if it gets wet inside that, it gets very humid. They're not a sparse kind of grapes. They're really quite kind of packed in there. And so, all those things.

The one thing about indigenous yeast. So, both are using indigenous yeast in a big way. One of the really cool things that I saw from a few different winemakers is that, I think, people often think that using natural yeast or wild fermentations or whatever is a bit uncontrolled or whatever.

These guys are doing a really cool technique where they pick some early fruit. At the start of harvest, they pick some fruit and they squish it and they put it to one side and they allow the yeast cultures

that are naturally present in those different vineyards to propagate. And then, they inoculate other fermentations using those yeasts that they've then got lots of from there.

So, they're actually almost trying to use the natural yeasts from the vineyard specifically for specific wines. And so, they're kind of almost combining the two. They're inoculating but they're using a natural indigenous yeast from there. And I mean, things like that, I just think are extraordinary and are things that have been done for thousands of years, but slightly more controlled in that sort of way. And so, they were really, really, really cool. That was one thing.

So, sandy soil. The cool thing about Bairrada is you've got really sandy bits of soil and then almost in the same vineyard, like really close to each other, it then suddenly gets kind of limestone-y clay, kind of rich, kind of heavy. And the sand holds no water at all. It just goes up and disappears. And then the clay obviously holds it a bit more.

And so, they're quite distinct styles of fruit that come from that. You get slightly more fruit intensity, I think, from clay. You get more heat retention as well as water retention. But the fun thing is that there's still quite a few un-grafted vines out in Bairrada because on sandy soil, the phylloxera doesn't touch it.

And so, I got the chance to go to two vineyards of Baga planted at the same time. They're next to each other. One's on sand, one's on clay. And the one that's grafted, the really amazing thing is what people don't talk about too much is American rootstocks. They really change the vigour, the amount of energy a vine has naturally.

And so, to look at Baga grown on its own roots and Baga grown on American rootstock, the American rootstock stuff was producing three times the fruit and three times the canopy as the stuff that was on its own rootstock in the ground.

And so here, to be fair, just one example, but Luis is talking about that. He was saying the Baga that was being made 150 years ago was so different from what we've got now. And speaking with other producers, they're often now green stemming or just getting rid of lots and lots and lots of fruit from Baga and things like that because of that kind of vigour. And they're trying to get it back to a place where there's more maturity in the fruit, there's more ripeness. Yeah, it's cool. And the vineyard age is enormous. 40 year vines are like everywhere. Yeah, it's good. Vinhas Vellas as they call it.

Janina Doyle 00:32:44 Exactly. If anyone sees that on a label, you know it's old vines. But I think that's intriguing because when you Google 'Baga' as a grape variety and what does it do? What does it taste like? What does it produce?

High yields and high vigour is mentioned everywhere. And that is extraordinary that you are now saying from being in that area, yes, it's true, but there's a reason it's not typically the grape variety. It's because of the root stock. That's fascinating. That's not on the Internet.

Tom Surgey 00:33:14 Yeah, the rootstock definitely exacerbates that character. That was definitely the finding. As I say, it's one producer so it's one example. So, I'm sure as with everything in wine, there are nuances and differences here, but it definitely is exacerbated by the American rootstock.

I also went to go and see a lovely winemaker called Mario at Quinta das Bageiras, which is about 15 minutes away from Luis, and they were great. The fizz was good. Again, the more mature fizz was amazing. They made some really, really, I would say sort of excellent, big concrete open fermented styles of wines, quite traditional in many ways.

It's a third generation family business. I met Mario's son who was really lovely, Fred. And although I'm not actually sure that's his name because everybody, every time that they said it was laughing at it, they'd had a big lunch and I think they'd made jokes that he was called Fred. So, I spent the whole time going, "Is he called Fred? It doesn't sound hugely Portuguese. Is he called Fred?"

I'm not entirely sure. I walked into the winery and I was with a couple of other people and there's a wine producer called Pedro Blanco, who is from the Douro. And we had lots of fun last year at harvest. I was out there and he cooked dinner for us and we had a bit of a party.

I walked into this winery and he was just stepping out of the winery with a couple of mates, having had a very big lunch. They do very big lunches in Portugal and it is another reason I like to go. So, you have this amazing moment of, and everyone will find this, the more wine trips you do, the more you visit places that you bump into people.

The world of wine is so small that we just had this lovely moment of an enormous hug and a glass of fizz together. And it was like, this is crazy. It's like, right. I'll see you in October. I'm coming back. Let's go and do that.

Actually, yeah, Quinta das Bageiras, they are definitely part of a community where there's lots of winemakers from all over Portugal that go and meet each other and share ideas. And yeah, it was super cool. Fizz was very good. Bical was very good. And the Baga was great, particularly 2019.

If people want to get into Baga and we can still find it in the UK a lot, it's available. 2019 was just euphorically good vintage. Everything I tasted from 2019 in Bairrada was amazing from the whites to the reds to everything. So, that's another little insider tip. Buy 2019. That's crucial.

Janina Doyle 00:35:25 Well, it's interesting as well in terms of producers, we've mentioned a few already and this one that you just said that I'm not gonna pronounce again. They are all part of the Baga of friends.

For anybody who wants to actually know some really top producers that really support this grape, you can go online annoyingly. It's not in English. You can't change it to English. It's all in Portuguese. Nonetheless, you can see the seven producers. It lists them. And then you can kind of explore from there these producers. And I say Baga. I keep on saying Baga.

Tom Surgey 00:35:59 It's good. Baga, whatever. It's good. Exactly.

Janina Doyle 00:36:05 Right. Now, I want to take us to the book. You have written a book that is going to be released in August very shortly. So, what was the inspiration for writing this book?

Tom Surgey 00:36:15 Janina, this is perfect. Thank you. I've wanted to write a book for about five years and I was aware – I was led to believe it was quite a big undertaking, which actually I can quash that rumor. It's not at all. If you're writing a book, you enjoy it. It's so much fun. It was brilliant. It was awesome. It was a joy to do.

Point number one is if you feel like you've got a book and you go and do it, because it was such a nice privilege thing to be able to go and do. But I definitely think writing one that you're looking forward to and enjoying and don't feel like you've been pushed into having to do or shoehorned into a particular space is good.

And my experience with it was, yeah, I've wanted to do it for five years and my agent and I have been going around and have been seeing publishers about it. I also said, I'll only do it if a publisher does it. I was really worried about writing a book and then going and shopping it around publishers. That sounded pretty harrowing as an experience.

So, I sort of said, look, if a publisher agrees that they like what I'm doing, then let's do it. And we had some great chats over that five years. And we had a couple of offers to do books, but they were always trying to shoehorn it into 'We like it but I think it should be like this.' You know, it should be an A to Z or it should be a slightly contrived or specific kind of format.

And I was thinking, I just don't know if I'll be able to really throw myself into that and make it what I wanted to be. I'm pretty polarised in my ability to do things. I'm either 100% in and absolutely doing something or I'm really not doing. That's very much the way I am.

And so, knowing that sort of, 'Oh, actually not sure this is the right one or whatever, or kind of never took those chats to fruition.' And then George Orion arrived, brilliant, beautiful, amazing editor and kind of arrived with this idea of, I think it's time for another Wine 101 – everything people need to know about wine set from the modern age for wine drinkers today.

And that is literally exactly what the book is. To be honest, I'd already written three chapters or something that we were taking round to people and all the rest of it. It was just that the fit was perfect. And so, George and I met up, we went for lunch in Noble rot. It was very nice. And we just hit it off. And so, that was how it happened.

The book is called 'How to Drink Wine.' And it is literally everything that I think people need to know to really enjoy it. And it's for people who don't really drink very much wine, people that don't think it's for them necessarily, people like me before I really got into it, people who do drink wine, but don't necessarily, haven't taken that leap to really getting under the skin of it and looking into it even more. And it's also for people that are really knowledgeable about wine, it's written at a level where, if you really know your stuff about wine.

It should be really engaging still because there is opinion and perspective and there's stuff to discover, I think, even from a good level of wine knowledge. I've tried to make it for everybody. I think it's quite funny. I think it's quite down to earth and relaxed. There's a couple of F* words in there. I quite got away with that. I was quite pleased about it. It's basically written as I would speak and present it on stage, is the idea.

Janina Doyle 00:39:21 I totally noticed that actually for certain titles that people will find out when they go through the book. I also love the fact that there's diagrams for everything because I'm actually more of a visual learner. There's lots of fun facts in there highlighted.

Actually as well, you can kind of flick through and be like, oh, I'll just take that today. You go into detail about your organics and what I love was the vine cycle because actually both of us have worked in vineyards.

I'm still working in a vineyard and explaining to people, like as an example, like now we're June-July time. So, it's flowering or at least it should have been flowering, but we're a bit delayed in England. And so, you can really understand that. For me, at the moment as well, I love talking to people about flowering because people don't realise that vines self pollinate.

Tom Surgey 00:40:12 Yeah, that's the thing. I mean, this, this comes up in the book. There's a whole thing about vines and how we got to where we are now. We've got almost entirely hermaphroditic vines, vines that just self-pollinate. There's no sort of bees and whatnot going on. There's no requirement. They just literally toss up some pollen and hope it sort of lands back on themselves, which is great.

And right at the stage we're at now, if you get loads of wind or you get loads of rain, then it's a problem. And the easy way to remember it in the UK is always pretty much it happens at the Wimbledon sort of fortnight or whatever. It basically happens around now, right? And the discrepancy, I would say this year in vineyards is enormous.

Like I definitely, I think some people are experiencing flowering, other people it's very delayed for and isn't happening. The last week has been quite nice weather. That's hopefully kind of getting everyone across the line a bit. At least I think it's been quite nice weather. I haven't actually been here, have I, to be fair.

Janina Doyle 00:41:09 Well, I can confirm for everybody listening as well. We are actually recording this right at the beginning of July. And yes, there is a bit of a delay because typically in the Northern Hemisphere, June typically is that month for flowering.

But anybody who's going into a vineyard, literally go and have a look. You'll see the flowers open. There's a big green thing in the middle. That's the ovary. That's the female ovary. And then there's lots of little sticks that is coming out and they're called stamens and at the top of that, they hold, just literally hold the pollen.

And hopefully with a little tickle, it would just, as you said, release it, throw it up into the air, and hopefully, which I find hilarious, the top part of this, the female part is called a stigma, which is not sure who called it that. It will hopefully take it, receive it and bring it down into the ovaries. Yeah, fascinating.

Tom Surgey 00:42:03 It's awesome. That is how it happens. Vines didn't always used to be like that. That is something that is something that most vine species are not. They don't just get on with it themselves, right?

But we have over literally millennia chosen vine species to make wine out of that are hermaphroditic. And we've taken anomalous examples of those vines that were hermaphroditic, even in varieties that weren't. And we've just chosen to propagate more and more of those because it is so much easier. It's the idea. And so, there's been a degree of intervention in that as well. But it's a lovely, lovely stage of time. It's awesome.

Janina Doyle 00:42:40 But I highly advise anyone just actually Google it, have a look, understand it, because it's a part of the vine cycle that's very misunderstood and it is quite beautiful. Also in your book, I love that you're talking about biodynamics. You mention, and that's the cool thing as well, you said it's for people like myself. I enjoyed reading through it. You're mentioning DRC, a biodynamic Domaine Zind Humbrecht. I can't remember anymore.

Tom Surgey 00:43:08 Exactly. Yeah, there's Zind Humbrecht in there. There is Michel Lafarge gets a mention, a whole bunch of people. And it's actually one of the things with writing this book was I didn't want to recommend specific wines at any point. And I didn't want to necessarily recommend specific producers.

Very often there are producers recommended there for different things. And they're kind of really good examples of people to look at within that specific chapter or whatever it might be. But I steer clear of sort of going, 'You need to drink 2019 Baga from Bairrada is what you need to drink because ultimately I would love this to be a book that people can still pick off their shelf in 10 years time when those wines are no longer anywhere to be found and make it easy.

But yeah, I used some of these guys as examples chiefly because if people wanted to look into it, they are from different parts of the world. Señá is there from Chile – who else? And the reason I kind of put them in is if people really get into the idea of biodynamics...

Quercibella from Tuscany! I love them! And so, they represent an interesting spread of biodynamic producers of different scales, different countries, different opportunities and challenges, approaches. Quercibella are vegan. And it's very hard to be vegan and do traditional biodynamics, because you have to kill cows and stick their horns with lots of manure in it under the ground for six months.

So, Quercibella don't do the domesticated animal side of it, but they do all the other stuff. And there's some really interesting perspectives in something there, something I'm enormously into. And really from an early stage caught my attention and I found it really interesting.

I think everyone's allowed an opinion on the meeting point between where spirituality and science meet and I think the aggregated kind of general view of it changes dramatically, like goes forward and backwards over time in the 15 years or whatever that I've been into it.

I think the popular opinion on it has really shifted in both directions all the time - sort of thing. Fundamentally though it does work. It appears to really work beautifully. And I really find it quite exciting when producers choose to do something for their winery that is slightly against the perceived norm or wisdom, but it's because they absolutely believe that it's going to be the right thing and the best thing for them.

And very few people start doing it and completely leave it. Sometimes people pull back a bit and they go, okay, well, that bit was a bit too much, we might not stir it clockwise under a full moon, that we might not do that bit, but we'll probably do the other bits. I think that's wicked.

It's again, that sense of exploration and keeping a constant open mind. And the only true thing is like my current opinion is this, it's constantly evolving around it. Yeah, I thought it was really hard to keep that chapter in there actually.

Whenever you're writing any book, there's a lot of pressure on it cannot be too long. It's got to go and I can't remember what got cut in order to keep biodynamics, but biodynamics, regenerative agriculture. There's a chapter on organics. This is a wine book for now and the future, you've got to know about these things. They're very much part of the wine world, you've got to understand them.

Janina Doyle 00:46:15 And I totally appreciate that. And I love that you have mentioned a few producers, because when you look at some of the top producers in the world, or producers that have been doing biodynamics for a really long time, you also realise it's not actually a fad.

So, it's nice for listeners or for people reading the book to be able to go and explore those producers and see, my God, how long have they been doing this for and getting a much greater sense of farming holistically, which is a really important thing of what we're doing.

Tom Surgey 00:46:42 Massively. In that similar space, look at regenerative agriculture as well, if you're into this sort of thing, and places like Domaine Mirabeau. Stephen and Jeany's amazing estate out in Provence, the single estate that they're practising regenerative agriculture in is amazing. Everflight in Sussex, go and talk to Luke Spalding. He's wicked and doing some really, really cool things. And so, there's so many great producers doing really genuinely thought-provoking positive things out there. That's great.

Janina Doyle 00:47:12 Now you mentioned some English wineries and you and I both have worked for an English winery, which means that we've opened up a lot of English sparkling wine.

And I really appreciate there's a whole section on etiquette and how to drink. And there was the bit about opening up Champagne or English sparkling wine. And I'm like, yes, yes, yes! Let's stop for a second. I want to finish this episode with people really understanding about the cage. So, I have a bugbear. I don't normally have many bugbears.

Now, of course you can open up wine, however you want. What frustrates me on Instagram is there are many people that are showing videos on how to open up champagne, or English sparkling wine, and straight away they take the cage off. And no, you can take the cage off, no problem.

But do not mention that if you take the cage off, you are now effectively allowing yourself to be smacked in the face by a flying cork, where that bottle of wine has the same amount of pressure as a bus tire. Tell everybody how to open up a bottle of traditional-method sparkling, please.

Tom Surgey 00:48:28 I have the same bugbear. In fact, a very good English producer the other day who I like a lot and won't mention, based in Kent, we were doing a gig and they were trying to open their bottle of sparkling and the cork was completely stuck and they were trying and trying and trying and I was backstage while they were presenting.

They popped back and they were like, "I cannot get this cork out. Would you mind trying to help?" And I said, "Of course, look, check it here." But as they did that, they came around with the cage off and sort of waggled it around and sort of, he's just like, "No, no, no, no, no, no."

So, that is the number one rule. It's whatever you do, once you've taken the cage off, and we'll talk and go from the start, but keep your thumb over it. Every winemaker in the world does it. People have gone blind. I've met somebody who lost an eye for sure.

Janina Doyle 00:49:07 Oh, my God! Apparently a dozen people die a year from cork injuries. 12 people die a year.

Tom Surgey 00:49:15 Of ways to go. That's, yeah, awful.

Janina Doyle 00:49:17 Exactly. I'm passionate that we all open our sparkling wines up correctly. Please, Tom over to you for everybody to listen carefully, please.

Tom Surgey 00:49:25 So, I caveat this like I do in my book where we talk about wine etiquette a lot. We talk about the rigmarole of it. Here's the ritual. Here's how it is done properly. All the rest of it. It is heavily caveated around, like anything like table manners, it's really important to know this stuff. It's completely up to you as and when to apply it and to what degree to apply it. Okay.

This isn't saying that you absolutely have to do all of these things at all times. Opening sparkling wine. So, yeah, same pressure as a bus tire, six bars of pressure in there when it's traditional-method.

Number one thing is to chill it down. Warm bottles of sparkling are highly volatile because carbon dioxide at warmer temperatures is a lot more volatile. And that means that when you take the lid off, you take the cage off the top of a bottle of wine, the cork is going to be pushed out with a greater degree of force, the warmer the wine is.

So, get it in the fridge for at least a couple of hours, get it really nice and cold. If you put it in an ice bucket and it's got water in it and it's really cold, that cork is not going to go anywhere even if it's pretty sort of loosely in there. Its carbon dioxide is pretty kind of relaxed at that point.

So, chill it, you then pick up the bottle and the crucial thing is you unwind the cage, which is called the muselet if you're in France. So, when you buy them and all the rest of it is always called muselet. And you turn it to the point and just give it a wiggle so that the base of the cage opens. So, it's free of the bottle.

Now you alluded to this, Janina. I don't take the cage off. I quite like it because I open lots of bottles of sparkling, but B, it gives you a bit more purchase, a bit more hold on the cork sort of thing. If you leave the cage on, there's no need to take it off. More grip.

And so, then what you do is you turn the bottle to a 45 degree angle, pretty much literally on its side or as close as you can to that. And then the most famous phrase here is about trying to twist the bottle and not the cork, okay, as you go and that sort of works, but I've never really quite managed to understand that.

I twist a bit of both. I twist a little bit of cork, a little bit of bottle, but keep a really firm pressure with your hands down on the cork so it doesn't get flying. And if you open that bottle with it on its side at a 45 degree angle or just above sort of thing, what happens is the base of the cork leaves the opening of the bottle gradually. It doesn't just pop out all of it at once and release this enormous amount of carbon dioxide. You get this really gentle little sigh of like, "Ah, perfect."

Janina Doyle 00:51:48 We want it to sound like a nun's fart, right?

Tom Surgey 00:51:54 That's your phrasing. That is your phrasing. You're very welcome to that! It could work. And so, that's how to do it. It's super easy. All the same thing applies to Prosecco. Less so to Pet-Nat because it's not very fizzy. You got half the pressure in a Pet-Nat, but all the sparkling wines chill them down, open them on their side a little bit, don't point a cork at people if it hasn't got the cage on it.

Also, side note on sabrage. This whole business of slicing the tops off bottles and stuff, you might have done this. I feel bad if you've done this. I hate it. I think it's such pomposity. Do you like it?

Janina Doyle 00:52:28 I love it. I love it. Nope, love it. Yep

Tom Surgey 00:52:34 Fair enough. You're fully in the Sabrage Club. You're welcome to it. It's absolutely awesome. I don't know. I just think it's a complete Instagram waffle.

Janina Doyle 00:52:42 I did it with a credit card.

Tom Surgey 00:52:44 Did you?

Janina Doyle 00:52:45 Okay, let's move on there. Yeah, I did it with a credit card. I'm just...

Tom Surgey 00:52:50 There you go. I've belied my sort of I'm not interested in it. I was instantly interested that you did that with a credit card to be fair. That is true.

Janina Doyle 00:52:57 So, what do you guys think? To sabrage or not to sabrage? Let me know. You can follow me on Instagram @eatsleep_winerepeat. And send me a DM and tell me if you're yay or nay. Are you team Janina or team Tom?

Also, if you don't have Instagram, you can always send me an email.

Janina@eatsleepwinerepeat.co.uk. And if you'd like the sound of Tom's book or getting it for somebody else, you can also follow the link in my show notes to pre-order the book. He will love you forever.

Now next week we'll continue in conversations but we'll be hopping across slightly, just to the right of Bairrada, to a wonderful gastronomic wine region in Portugal called Dão. This is a region that you absolutely need to know more about.

Now to finish off with, as always, a wine quote and so I'll put the spotlight back on Luis Pato, who we've been talking about on this episode, and talking about himself, he said, "Baga is a grape variety that, like me, is not easy to handle." But his wine quote that I will finish off with is:

"Wine is a question of passion and curiosity. If you lack either, you'll never understand it."

So, stay curious, stay passionate, keep exploring the world of wine. And whilst you do it, please go to your podcast app and leave some stars, leave a rating, like it, a review. All of this makes the podcast far more discoverable for other hungry, passionate, curious wine lovers to discover these episodes. Share the podcast with your wine-loving friends and wishing you all a positive, energising, tasty week ahead. Until next Monday, wine friends, cheers to you!