

# THE SOURCE

*Quinta da Carolina*  
*Douro, Portugal*



Rarely will you meet such a young talent in the wine industry as Luis Candida da Silva, the young winegrower (vintage 1988) in full control of his family's Douro estate, Quinta da Carolina. It's easy to recognize his drive, intelligence, and tasting prowess, as Dirk Niepoort, the globe-trotting wine empire builder based in Douro and most famous for his Port wines, did during Luis' first harvest with him as an intern in 2013. In 2018 after the famous winemaker Luis Seabra left Niepoort to focus on his own projects, he was asked to not only man the post, but to build on it and take it to the next level, which he has.

Luis' wines are the embodiment of intention realized. All four are very different, though clearly crafted by the same technical mind and capable hands. They reflect many facets of the European winescape, though all grown in Portugal's Douro, in the subzone of Cima Corgo, the middle of this vast appellation, and all on schist/slate soils of varying colors—gray, blue, yellow.



*Quinta da Carolina in the foreground across from south-facing Port wine production vineyards*

First is his white labeled *Xis*, grown organically at a high altitude of 500m on extremely poor soils and with a mix of white grapes with Malvasia Fina (not in relation to the famous Malvasia family of Italy), is a razor-sharp, mineral bomb, crystalline, salty, gulpable. *Xis Amarelo* is a gorgeously suave and fine red with fabulous texture that highlights the rocky terroir of the Douro; Pinot Noir-like, with upfront, supple but regal red and only slightly dark fruits. In a blind tasting, the techniques Luis employs may land even very skilled tasters in unexpected places and they'll think it was made by famous top domaines. *Quinta da Carolina*, the estate wine is a field blend of more than twenty-five grapes with an average age of about 100 years. Most are red but there's some white as well, resulting

in a clear expression of Douro still wine from a steep, slightly amphitheater-shaped hill facing almost exactly north to keep freshness; here one will find a wine with more body and juicy disposition. The project of Luis and Carmelo Peña Santana, a Spaniard who used to work with Luis at Niepoort and has since had his own project in Spain's Canary Islands, is called *ElBmento*, a beautiful and progressive contemporary Douro wine raised in amphora on skins for eight months, then pressed and aged further in steel until its second spring. It's wonderfully sculpted and framed by all the sun, the earth, the river, the 600m altitude, and a multitude of grapes harvested from 100-year-old vines, with an array of red, purple and slightly and pleasantly brown nuances of classic Douro wines (minus the oak), like chestnut and fall foods.

We sent Luis a list of questions about his life and process and it was so well written that we thought it best to leave it as is. His English seems native (though his stories are best told accompanied by eye contact), and what follows are his responses, only slightly edited.



What is most important to you about how your wines are perceived and how they are experienced?

I want my wines to be perceived as authentic, made with care, for people and for nature, with a strong sense of place: Douro. That's what I like to express, and it was always my perspective. Besides being a "one man show" in lots of parts of the process there is help, from the family, from friends, from growers, from my helpers on the vineyard, and there is always respect in every part of the chain.

University?

I studied Agricultural Engineering in Portugal and attained a Master of Winemaking in Tarragona, Spain. My thesis in the Master was about indigenous yeasts and their potential of fermentation. There is a scientific article written by me in the book “The new perspectives on research in wine.” (Nuevas perspectivas en investigación vitivinícola 2013 pp:113-116.

Was winegrowing part of your family history?

I'm 4th generation connected to the wine business, but first in production. Everyone in my immediate family is either in the retail or distribution business. Always helped my father in the wine shop since my early days, as early as I could carry a box of wine. I also worked as a bartender during school times to earn extra cash. Everything else I've ever done has been work in vineyards and wineries.

How did you become interested in wine?

Since I was very young, I always enjoyed beer and champagne. In my early teenage years I began to be rebellious, so my father punished me with a summer of no vacation time by leaving me in the Douro in our winery in the middle of nowhere, no phones, no internet, nothing, only work to be done in the winery and vineyard. When he came to pick me up after three weeks I didn't want to leave. I discovered my happy place.



How long have you worked with Dirk Niepoort and what is/was your title there?

I've worked with Dirk for 5 years (as of 2022), but my first harvest at Niepoort was in 2013 as an intern. In 2018, I came back to be head winemaker responsible for all Douro still wines, not the fortified wine program. That's an entirely different process.

Did you work at other places prior to Niepoort?

I worked as a cellar hand in Villa Maria (New Zealand), Pommery (Champagne), as a vineyard and cellar hand in Lothar Ketterm (Mosel), and as an assistant winemaker at Klein Constantia (South Africa), Forgeron Cellars (Washington State) and Quinta Nova (Portugal).

Was there a particular moment or event that motivated you to pursue a career in wine?

Nothing particular, though I have always been involved in the industry. I believe from working in the shop with my father I decided early on that working in a closed environment and selling wine was not for me.

When did you first work in a vineyard and make wine?

My family bought Quinta da Carolina in 2006. Since then the interest of working in the vineyard grew. My first real work there was in 2008 (I believe) harvesting and carrying grapes and bringing them to the winery. I was twenty at the time. My first wine, 100% all me (because the other wines I made were either working for someone or helping in my family's winery), was Quinta da Carolina in 2015, age 27.

Is there anyone from the past and/or in the present that has influenced/inspired your project the most?

Obviously I have Dirk, who is like my winemaking grandfather, though we are not related. He taught me a lot. How to observe vineyard sites and decide what to make with the grapes, on timing of the process (it's all about timing), on *how to be humble and respect the elders*. I have to admit that he's influenced me a lot. Besides him and having to know the man and work with them, I have a few winemakers that I've never met, and some of them I probably never will, but their wines touch my heart, like Emmanuel Reynaud (Château Rayas), Jean Paul Jamet (Côte-Rôtie, France), Wilhem Haag (Mosel, Germany) and Edoardo Valentini (Abruzzo, Italy).

What type of wines do you drink and what producers do you follow?

Uff.. It's all about moods and bank account. I wish I could drink more Raveneau, Roulot and Mugnier, but nowadays I cannot afford those, so I go more into Pierre Yves Colin-Morey, Guiberteau, Cos, Comando G. I like finesse and precision, wines that have character and show exactly the place they come from.

How does Jerry Luper, from California wine fame fit into the story of Quinta da Carolina?

Jerry was famous for his Freemark Abbey wines in the judgment of Paris—the only CA producer to have both white and red selected for the showdown. His career as a winemaker included some of California's best wineries, Freemark Abbey, Château Montelena, Rutherford Hill and Diamond Creek. He came to Portugal in the beginning of the 90's working with Carvalho, Ribeiro & Ferreira and eventually took over the direction of fine wines in Real Companhia Velha (RCV) in Douro. He bought this property in 1994 and called it Quinta da Carolina, after his wife, Carolee. He made wines off this very old vineyard, and we believe he mixed the grapes here with Cabernet Sauvignon that he could get from RCV. The wines were very good, in a bold, classic way. Since the first wines he produced in 1999, my family bought them for the shop and he was also a very good client and in 2006, by coincidence, my family bought the property. My father, with no knowledge about winemaking, hired a French winemaker to make the wines, and he was in charge from 2006 until 2015, making wines in a very classical way (lots of new oak)—good wines but they need a lot of time to express. 2009 and 2011 were exceptional.

## GRAPES

Quinta da Carolina vineyard was planted in 1931 and we have the traditional field blend of Douro: Tinta Amarela, Tinta Barroca, Tinto Cão, Rufete, Bastardo, Touriga Franca, Tinta Carvalha, Touriga Nacional, Rabigato, Malvasia Fina, Malvasia Preta, Cornifesto, Alicante Bouschet, Souzão. There are also other varieties we don't know.

All the varieties grow together randomly in the vineyard, though they all have different vegetative cycles. The main advantage is that I believe it is one of the truest ways to express terroir: multi-varietal equals biodiversity which equals true expression. It's much more difficult to work the vineyard when you have different growing cycles and in the case of flowering it can be a one-month process, which leaves us open to more incidents of coulure (also known as shatter; the loss of flowers resulting in the loss of potential fruit), especially with Touriga Nacional. But in the end when you harvest, you'll always have a greener phenolics with riper ones. This is the natural balance of our vineyard (the elders knew this long before technological advances), and that's why we always have a good natural acidity in the wines.

Do you have a lot of different biotypes of the grapes you have planted? Are they clonal or massale selections?

Complete massale selection. When we prune we save the best ones (and sometimes we don't have any idea what variety it is) and then we craft next year in the rootstock. Nowadays we are selecting the ones that fit best to drought and sunburn because we believe in the future we will have more years like 2022.

How old are the vines on your property?

1931 for Quinta da Carolina and 1919 for Xis (branco) and El3mento. Xisto amarelo are the younger ones, planted in 2001.

How does your area differ from other areas of Douro? How else do the vineyards differ?

We are in Cima Corgo in the middle of Douro, one of the three main subzones of Douro—others are Baixo Corgo (west) and Douro Superior (east)—with a good balance of rainfall and heat. Normally the closer you are to Spain (Douro Superior) the less rainfall and more heat, and closer to Marão (Baixo Corgo), the more rainfall and less heat.

Quinta da Carolina vineyards are north facing, so there's less sunlight and consequently less heat than west and south facing vineyards. Also, as they are 120-180m makes big difference in the profile when compared to the wines for wine Xis, at 500m (in a very different setting away from the river) and slightly north facing, and as we have a bigger diurnal range we always have more freshness retained in the grapes.



*Vineyard for Xis Branco*

Xisto Amarelo is more or less at the same height as Quinta da Carolina and faces east, with only part of it catching the earlier and fresher sun. With a blend with a majority of Touriga Franca, it makes a totally different profile of wine.

## CLIMATE + FARMING + VINEYARDS

Is climate change a big influence on the style of your wines? Has it changed the agricultural decisions in the vineyard over the years, or winemaking processes?

Yes and Yes. The weather is getting warmer, and winters are getting milder. We now have early budding some years around February, less problems with fungal diseases and more and more drought. The main problem nowadays is the lack of water in the soil; as winters are milder they are also dryer, so the soil's water reserves are getting poorer, which creates big issues with hydric stress. We need to have healthier vines with more nutrition for them to thrive during the growing season and survive the stressful hot summers. This obliges us to change soil mobilization and incorporate more organic matter to correcting the soil pH more frequently, changing pruning systems from VST/VSP (vertical shoot positioning) to bush vine training (goblet, alberello) to protect the cluster from sunburn, and also select more suitable and adaptable varieties to this change in the climate, like Tinto Cão, Tinta Francisca, Rufete.

How much earlier (on average) is budbreak and harvest time?

I cannot answer this precisely because the styles changed as well, and this gap between the budding and harvest is directly influenced, but I believe we are about two weeks earlier than usual in only the last three harvests.

What is the biggest problem with Douro, heat?

Yes. In the last five years there's been a 1.5°C shift.

How does the climate differ from neighboring appellations or communes?

Douro is a microclimate. As we are in a geologic depression that accumulates heat, and the deeper into the Douro you go, the warmer it gets, the more the continental dry climate has influence. As we are in the Cima Corgo, I believe it is the midway between a dry/semi-dry desert climate and Vinho Verde climate with more humid and deeper/richer soils.

Can you explain Porto fortified vineyard cultivation compared to still wine cultivation? Are they worked differently? On different aspects, etc?

It's the same type of cultivation. It's a bit complex to fully explain how the system works, but the long story short is that there is an authorization of certain vineyards to produce port wine, for example Quinta da Carolina, and that amount of port wine to be produced varies according to the market and the production, which the institute of port wine decides every year. For example, from my vineyard in 2022 I was allowed to produce 1500L of port wine, but I didn't. I sold that "benefit"/authorization to a port wine house that can vinify grapes. We can make port wine and table wine from the same vineyard, but obviously no one does. Everyone chooses warmer sites, mostly south facing positions, for port wine production and higher altitude and more north and east facing positions for table wines.



How many hectares do you have in total?

We own 2.4ha of grapes at Quinta da Carolina, though the property is 7ha—the remainder is the house (winery in the basement floor), olive and fruit trees, and brush. We also rent 1.3ha for Xis and El3mento.

What is the bedrock and soil type of the vineyards? Is all the topsoil derived from the bedrock, or does it originate from other places, like alluvium or other sedimentary/river deposits?

At Quinta da Carolina it's mostly schist/slate with a topsoil of about 40 to 50 cm, very low depth of topsoil with the hard mother rock right there, a yellow/brown schist. I believe topsoil is generated from the bedrock and other sedimentary deposits. The other vineyards rented for the Xis wines are also on schist but in an area at a much higher altitude (500m, whereas Carolina is at an average of 150m) with perhaps the same amount of topsoil depth. These vineyards are far from the river with a topsoil completely derived from the bedrock.



*Quinta da Carolina schist rocks*

What's the average age of the vines, and how old are the oldest?

All of them are close to 100 years old. Carolina's vines are a bit younger at around 90, and Elemento and Xis are more than 100.

Are there laws for minimums/maximums for the amount of vines per hectare? How many do you have per hectare?

Yes, there are laws, 55hL/ha for reds and 65hL/ha for whites, but I never reach even half of those amounts because the vineyards are very old.

Were your vineyards farmed in a good way before your arrival? What changes have you made since you took over and how do you think your adaptations affected the grapes and wines?

Quinta da Carolina has been very well farmed since 2011, though they used herbicide. I arrived in 2015 and immediately changed to organic agriculture. We are certified organic, but we don't put it on the label. I can supply you with our certification if you want it.

There were lots of challenges through the first years, in terms of nutrition and diseases, mainly because I was not familiar with organic agriculture and I had to learn it from the scratch—self study—though nowadays it's becoming easier as I know the vineyard a bit more and all the wrong things we did in the past.

How would you describe your farming philosophy?

I believe in the balance of the ecosystem, so I try to integrate an organized agriculture in the balance of nature, with respect for every living being, from insects to wild boars. Apart from organic farming and some biodynamic principles and infusions like nettle, chamomile and horsetail, we also leave some of the late fruit (as well as some olives) for the migrating birds. We work organically in the vineyard that we rent, but our agreement there is to pay according to weight, so we're more focused on the production and the balance between volume and quality.

What is your practice regarding plowing?

Every now and then we work the soil with a horse, just to correct pH of the soil (as in Douro pH's are really low and the vines struggle to absorb available nutrients) and to incorporate some organic matter. Normally we move earth every three years. Plowing is very healthy for the old vines as we also prune some roots, stimulating the growth of younger more productive ones, and aerate these compact soils to stimulate more microbial activity.

How much of an issue does mildew present? It's pretty dry, so I suspect that spraying is minimal. How many treatments are typical for an average year?

We have some years that we have problems with mildew, like 2018 and 2021, but normally it's more problematic with powdery mildew. We normally work the vineyards with treatments 2 to 3 times per season, one or two times with copper, and the others with infusions and sulfur, or only infusions. In 2022, for example, because it was so hot, we only worked the vineyard twice with one application of horsetail infusion and another with chamomile and calcium carbonate (natural sunscreen)—no copper, no sulfur.

During the fruit ripening period, from veraison to picking days, what is the typical difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures (general range)?

It can vary significantly from 23-28°C during the day to 8-15°C at night in spring and then from late July on we have more heat like 28-35°C during the day and 18-25°C at night.

By what measure do you decide to pick grapes? Chemistry? Only by taste?

Always taste.



*Mixed agriculture of Quinta da Carolina in the foreground*

## THE WINES

All of the wines we produce have nothing but a bit of sulfur. I don't correct acidity, not even in warmer years. I like to see this vintage variation in the wines.

We work in the winery respecting the grapes, and our job is to not spoil them. We believe the wines are made in the vineyard. Fermentations are spontaneous and natural with controlled atmospheric temperature. Some reds don't macerate for a long time, while others do for a very long time. White is normally pressed and put straight to barrel to ferment with its full lees.

Then after fermentation and malolactic (on all wines, even the whites) we correct a bit with sulfur and age them in barrel, inox, amphora, or in fuder.

## XIS BRANCO

Xis was born in 2019 from the insane search for the best white vineyards of Adorigo / Barcos in Tabuaço region – Douro Valley. A very old vineyard, between 500 and 550m high, facing north, with Malvasia Fina as the major variety in the field blend, along with Gouveio, Rabigato, Dona Branca and Viosinho. 2019 was considered a dry year in the valley, with rain showers when the plant most needed them, was a perfect agricultural year, with medium high productions and very healthy grapes, picked on the 4th of September and pressed on the same day in a vertical press, in an oxidative way, directly to used barrels. Fermentation was spontaneous, on the heavy lees, and malolactic happened in a 1/3rd of the barrels, naturally. The wine aged on the heavy lees for a year and then went to stainless steel over winter, where it decants and stabilizes naturally. The wine was bottled by gravity with no filtration or fining, whatsoever. Bottled on the 15th of May—620 bottles.



*Old German fuder in Dirk Niepoort's cellar—same fuder for Quinta da Carolina*

## XISTO AMARELO

Xisto Amarelo was born in 2017 from working with the same vineyard over 10 years, Amarelinha vineyard, characteristic from its yellow schist (xisto amarelo), planted in patamares [single- or double-row terraces on extremely steep hillsides] in the beginning of the millennium, facing east and surrounded by forest, with Touriga Francesa as the major variety, along with a little of Tinta Amarela. 2019 was considered a dry year in the valley, with rain showers when the plant most needed them, was a perfect agricultural year, with medium high productions and very healthy grapes, picked on the 11th of September. The warm days and cool nights, in this vineyard, gave very

balanced fruit in 2019. During the picking there is an extraordinary work of selection of grapes, so when arriving at the winery there is no selection and the grapes are thrown into a concrete lagar, whole bunch, and foot stomped lightly. Fermentation is spontaneous with very low levels of sulfur and with temperature control. After 3 weeks on the skins the grapes are pressed and the wine goes directly to a 50yo German oak fuder, where malolactic happens and stays over one year and a half aging.

## QUINTA DA CAROLINA

The vineyard of Quinta da Carolina is dated from 1931, with almost 2ha of indigenous varieties, with the majority of Tinta Amarela, Tinto Cão, Touriga Francesa, Tinta Francisca, Rufete, Tinta Roriz and Bastardo. This diversity of varieties along with the fact that the vineyard is facing north, allows us to harvest earlier and have a lot of freshness and balance between the different ripening degrees. The year of 2017 was a very dry year and also one of the warmer years of the XXI century. The rain didn't fall since the beginning of the cycle and the temperatures were warm even during the spring, which anticipated the harvest, that was on the 18th of August. The stress that the plants were having because of the lack of water showed a lot of concentration in the fruit, but also very healthy grapes. After a very careful sorting in the vineyards, during the picking, the grapes arrived at the winery and went directly, whole bunch, to a concrete lagar, and were foot stomped lightly just to have some juice to start fermentation spontaneously. A two-week maceration on the skins with a very light extraction happened in the lagar, then the grapes were pressed, and the wine went to 500-liter barrels of Austrian and French oak for malolactic fermentation. The wine aged over 30 months in barrel, followed by a year in stainless steel where it stabilizes naturally. The wine was bottled by gravity, manually, with no filtration, fining, whatsoever.

## ELEMENTO

El3mento is a partnership wine made with Carmelo Peña Santana, that since they met each other in university, they had a dream to make wine together. After 5 years of planning and designing the wine, El3mento was born in 2017 from a centenary vineyard at 600m of altitude in the area of Barcos - Tabuaço in the Douro Valley. The second El3mento was made in 2019, a dry year in the valley, with rain showers when the plant most needed them, was a perfect agricultural year, with medium high productions and very healthy grapes, picked on the 23rd of September and on the same day selected and processed into a 1000L clay amphora, whole bunch and lightly foot stomped. Fermentation was spontaneous, and maceration post-fermentation was from September 2019 to May 2020—8 months, a very high risk process, and that's why El3mento is not released every year. In May 2020 the grapes were pressed to a stainless steel vat, where the wine stayed until April of 2021. It was bottled without any adjustment, filtration, whatsoever.