

2011

The
Vintage
Port Club

February 27th 2026



Vintage 2011 — A Study in Time and Expression

When a vintage such as 2011 takes center stage, it naturally invites multiple points of entry. The most immediate is the widely held consensus: that this is — if not *the* greatest vintage of the century — then certainly among the very few deserving of that distinction. The question, then, presents itself almost unprompted: Does it live up to the claim? And closely behind it follows another: What, precisely, defines its greatness?

Charles Symington noted in his diary on March 15, 2013, that the wines are marked by a rare synthesis of elegance, power, and structure — and that “elegance” in this context is not synonymous with lightness, but rather with aromatic intensity and a near-paradoxical balance seldom achieved. It offers a precise and compelling framework for an evening such as this.

For those drawn to mature vintage port, little persuasion is needed when a great vintage is on offer. When the lineup includes wines from twelve different houses, interest shifts from curiosity to inevitability.

Opening and Decanting

Three hours before the tasting, 24 bottles were opened and decanted in a small cellar room. The air quickly filled with an intoxicating blend of blackcurrant and blackberry — dense, vivid, and unmistakably youthful.

All corks were extracted using a Durand opener: blades carefully inserted between cork and neck, followed by a measured turn of the screw. The process was seamless across all bottles — unsurprising, perhaps, given their relative youth. Most corks bore both house name and vintage, clearly stamped.

Provenance varied. Some bottles had rested in the club's cellar for years; others had been acquired more recently. In principle, this should bear no consequence for the wine itself. A few minor observations were noted — slight moisture on one of the Fonseca and Smith Woodhouse corks — but these left no imprint on either nose or palate. No bottle showed signs of fault upon opening.



From Cellar to Glass

Following decanting, the wines were cooled before being poured approximately thirty minutes prior to the tasting, allowing them time to open and settle in the glass.

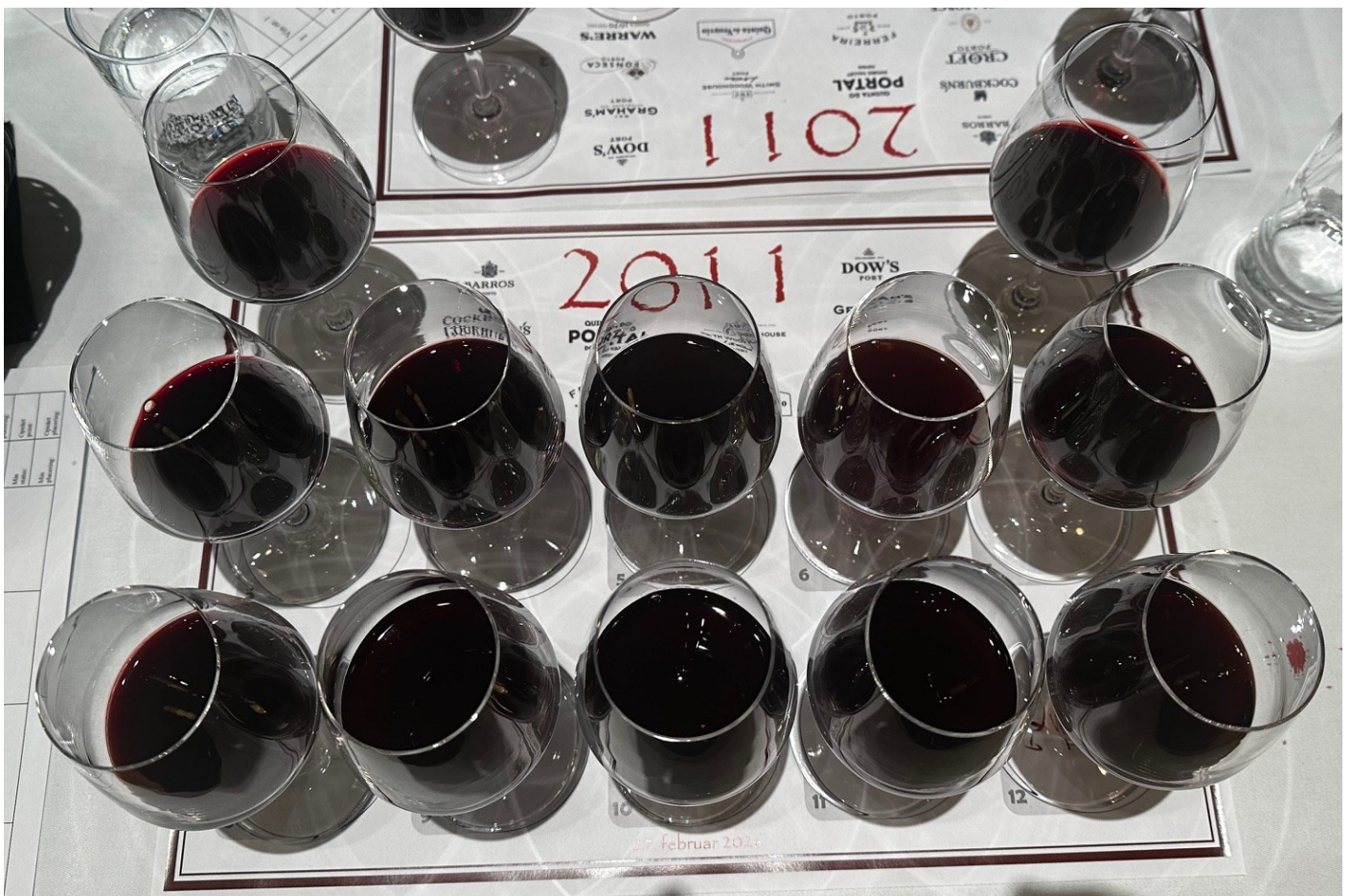
The conditions of the 2011 growing season have been well documented as exceptional. Thirteen years after bottling, the evening offered an opportunity to revisit those expectations. At the same time, a more personal question inevitably emerged: Which wine gives the greatest pleasure today — and which demands more time? Whether those answers align is a different matter entirely.



The Tasting

The tasting began slightly ahead of schedule, with all participants present. Early impressions were briefly disrupted by a flawed bottle of Cockburn (wine no. 7) at table A. Fortunately, the remaining decanter from table B allowed for at least a partial assessment.

Warre's (wine no. 12) at table B initially showed a cabbage-like note — a reductive character that gradually dissipated over the following ninety minutes, without affecting the palate.



Observation and Analysis

The group itself reflected a broad spectrum of experience, united by a shared curiosity. From intuitive impressions to detailed analysis, the discussion moved freely — and productively — between perspectives.

Color was the first point of distinction. One wine, Portal (no. 6), stood out as noticeably lighter, while the remaining wines clustered closely, with only subtle variation at the rim.

Beyond that, similarities outweighed differences. Some wines appeared drier, with more pronounced tannins, but alcohol was never a point of focus. Across all houses, integration was complete — neither intrusive nor dominant.

Participants evaluated the wines using both the Parker scale and two additional criteria: immediate preference and long-term potential. This dual perspective sparked lively discussion — around stylistic recognition, personal bias, and individual interpretation.

The Results

The aggregated scores reveal a striking picture: fewer than four points separate the highest and lowest ranked wines. Between second and eleventh place, the difference is less than two points. At one table, the total spread was just 2.6 points.



This suggests not the absence of distinction, but rather a compression of quality at a high level. Differences were consistently described as nuances rather than clear divisions. Whether these nuances reflect objective quality or subjective preference remains open to interpretation.

Notably, every wine was ranked first by at least one participant, while eleven of the twelve appeared within the top four rankings. The conclusion is unavoidable: the field is both deep and tightly grouped.

Preferences inevitably play a role. Some gravitate toward power, others toward elegance. Tannins may be seen as structure or imbalance. Even the dynamics at the table — the influence of shared observations — cannot be discounted.

It is also worth acknowledging that variables such as decanting time and serving temperature were not systematically controlled, and may have influenced individual performances.

Drink or Hold?

The distinction between immediate appeal and long-term potential proved equally nuanced. Cockburn (no. 7) was most frequently selected for drinking now, though only by a minority of participants. Warre's (no. 12) was most often identified as a wine to cellar further. Neither category produced a clear consensus.

Vin	Hus	Ejer	Score	Plads
1	Barros	Kopke Group	87,5	12
2	Delaforce	Silva Reis	88,9	11
3	Ferreira	Sogrape	89,8	7
4	Croft	Fladgate Partnership	89,5	8
5	Fonseca	Fladgate Partnership	89,3	9
6	Portal	Fladgate Partnership	89,0	10
7	Cockburn	Symington Family	90,5	4
8	Dows	Symington Family	90,5	5
9	Grahams	Symington Family	90,5	5
10	Smith Woodhouse	Symington Family	90,8	2
11	Vesuvio	Symington Family	90,7	3
12	Warre's	Symington Family	91,4	1



Closing Reflections

This was a tasting that resonates — not for providing definitive answers, but for framing the right questions. Some wines displayed an unexpected dryness. At the lower end, rankings were relatively consistent. At the top, however, the margins were fine: two or three wines could justifiably have taken first place. The middle tier, broad and closely packed, consisted of wines that were distinct, yet difficult to separate meaningfully.

As for the vintage itself: does 2011 embody the combination of elegance, power, and structure described by Symington? The answer, by the end of the evening, was affirmative. Power and structure were evident throughout. Elegance emerged most clearly in the upper and middle tiers — where the majority of wines were found.

This first exploration of the 2011 vintage will not be the last. The wines have time on their side — and, one hopes, so do we. Those present are already looking ahead to the next opportunity to revisit them, and to observe how they continue to evolve.

Our thanks go to all participants, and to everyone who contributed to making the tasting possible.

Robert Williamsen

