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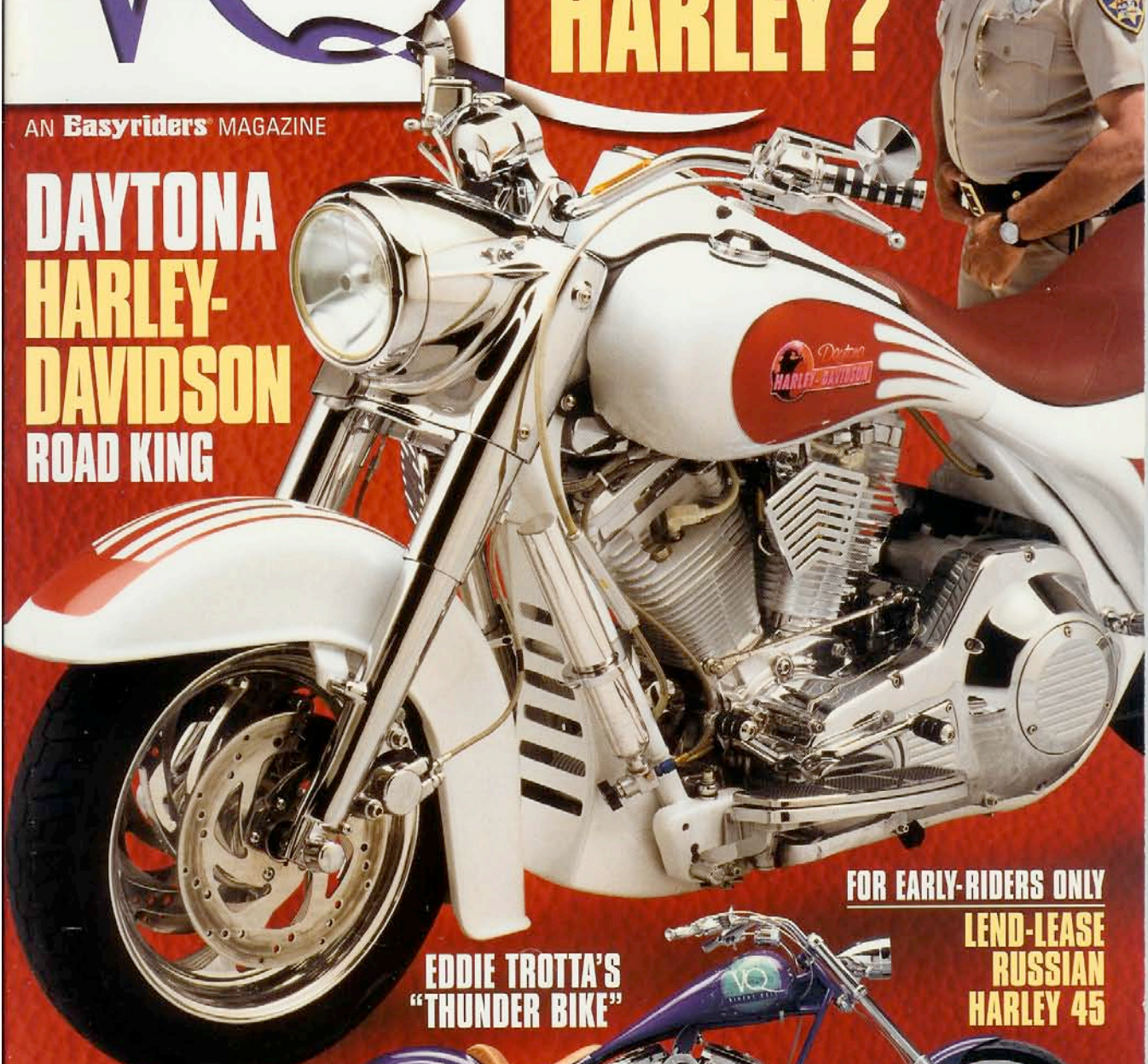
NUMBER 25

CHIP'S ERIK ESTRADA ON A HARLEY?

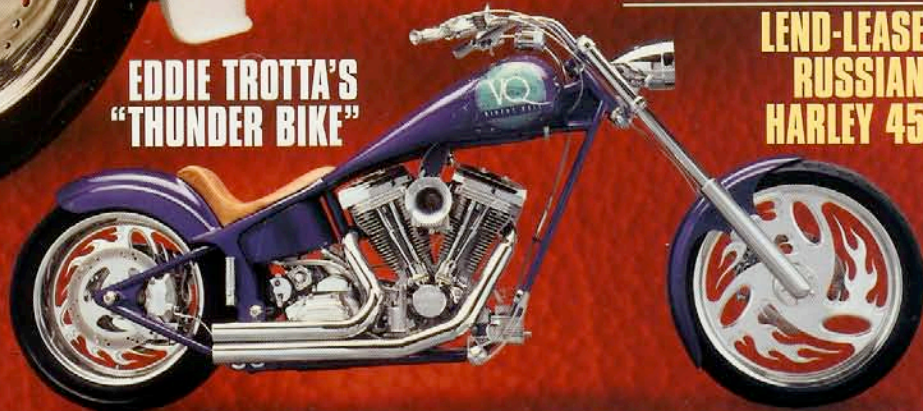


AN **Easyriders** MAGAZINE

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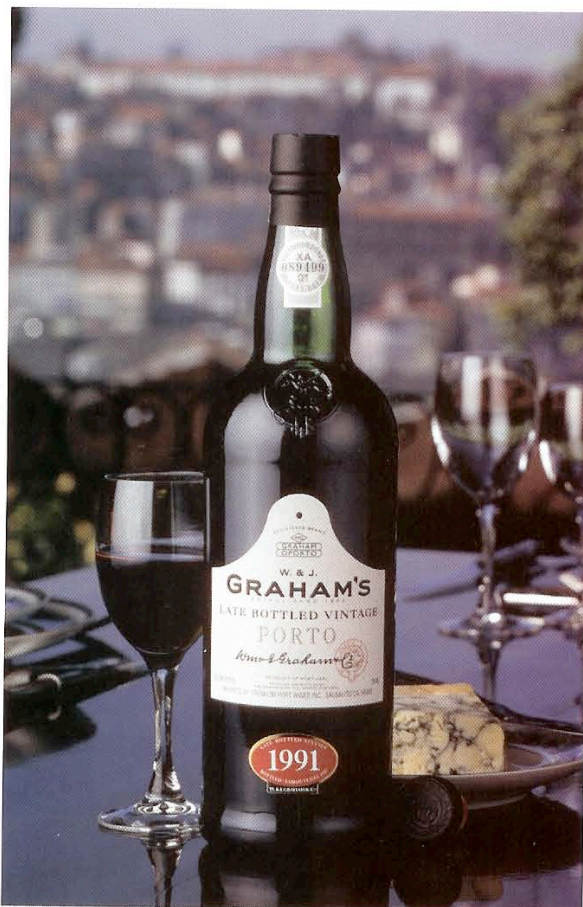
ANY PORT IN A STORM

Odds are the late movie was your first experience with port. You know the scene: The Lord of the manor retires for the evening, summoning his servant to bring him a nightcap of the finest vintage port. Or maybe it was on *Frasier* when he and Niles wish to appear urbane. Either way, you've always seen port as the drink of choice for the rich and crusty upper class. Well, guess what? This is no longer the case. In fact, it never was.

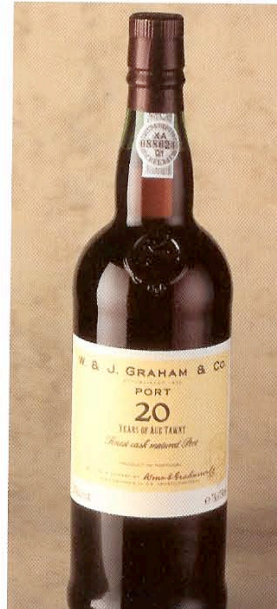
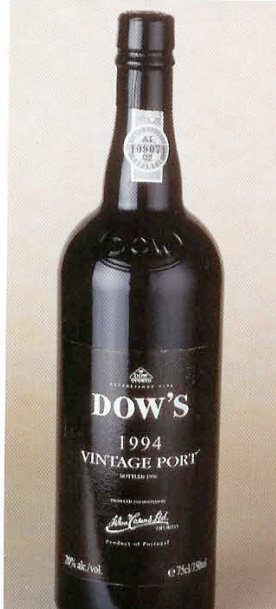
People who have been drinking port for years have been using "buzz words" to keep the rest of us from ever experiencing the pleasures of the wine once known simply as Red Portugal.

The first thing to know is how special the wine you're drinking is. Port is produced in only one region of the world, the 1,000-square-mile Douro Valley in the north of Portugal. The valley is located just 60 miles from Porto, the second largest city in Portugal, which gives the wine its name.

OK, so it comes from a small area, but that's not what makes it special. What sets port apart from other wines is the way it's produced. Brandy is added to port during the fermentation process, stopping it before the yeast has had a chance to completely eat all the grape's sugar. This serves two purposes. It makes the wine sweeter and raises the alcohol content. Port is required to have an alcoholic content of at least 16.5 percent (33 proof). Thing is, it was an accident. In 1678, when port was first shipped to Britain, brandy was added purely to stabilize the wine for the long voyage. It wasn't until the beginning of the 19th century that the use of brandy was appreciated for producing a higher quality drink. And the higher alcohol content? Ever since 1906, that's been a legal requirement.



Clockwise: Graham's Late Bottled Vintage Port, Graham's 20 Year Tawny, Dow's 1994 Vintage Port.



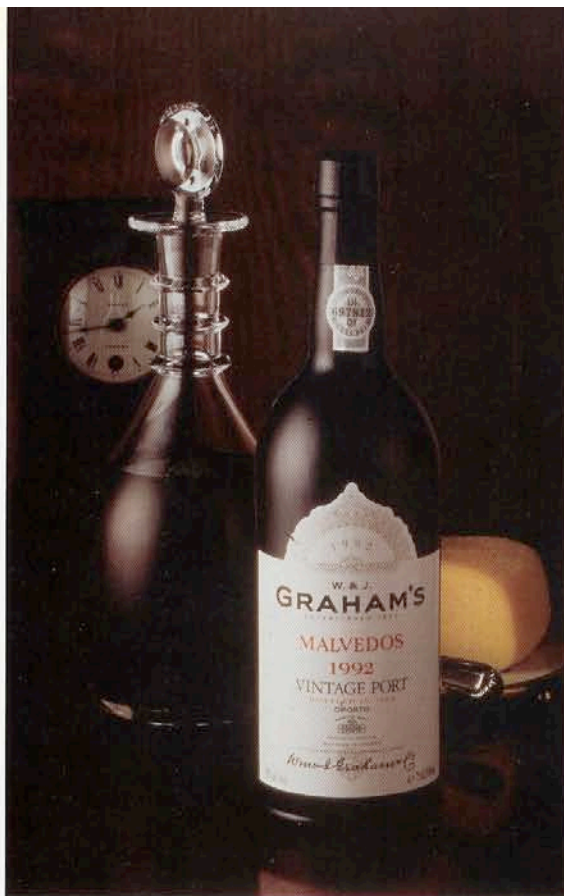
Now to choose your bottle for the evening. There are a number of options to consider, from which house produced it to whether you require a vintage wine. As far as wineries go, there are several hundred (or more) that produce good ports, but some of the top names are Warre's, Dow's, Graham's, or any others produced by the Symington family of wineries.

As for vintage, having a year on the bottle's label is a mark of distinction that classifies it as a "vintage year." By definition, a vintage port is the highest quality wine made from an exceptionally good year of grape harvest. A vintage is not declared as such until the second year after bottling has occurred (which usually happens after two to three years of cask aging). Vintage years vary from winery to winery, but since the Douro Valley is so small, it is quite often that one year will give many different houses a vintage port. As an example, 1945 is considered the finest post-war vintage of this century, and the 1994 ports are on their way to becoming respected vintage. The problem with a vintage port is it takes a number of years to mature. There is an old adage among port connoisseurs that a vintage wine should be at least as old as the drinker, although for most bottles, 10 to 20 years is fine. While it's waiting for its day, port should be stored on its side so the cork doesn't dry out.

Now that we know a little about what we're drinking, we should know how to drink it. A vintage port must be decanted before serving. A day before you plan to drink it, the bottle should be stood upright so all the sediment can sink to the bottom. On the big day itself, the bottle should be opened about four hours before you plan on drinking it

and poured immediately into a decanter, slowly, to prevent the sediment from leaving the bottle.

After dinner, when the port is served, the host starts with his (or her) glass (filling it about 2/3 full) and passes the bottle to the left. An old military tradition states the bottle is passed until empty. As a dessert wine, port is something to be savored in the mouth, almost as if you were chewing it. Traditionally, chocolate is served to accompany the wine, but cheese trays are often a more suitable choice, delightfully mixing the sweetness of the wine with the salty tang of a brie, cheddar, or Stilton.



Graham's Malvedos Vintage Port.



The Graham's Port "barco rabelo."



The Graham's Lodge at the turn of the century.

Now that you know all this, feel free to emulate the lord of the manor. Sit down in front of the fire with your silk robe and have someone bring you a glass of vintage port. You can even smoke a cigar if you wish, and make your transformation complete. But wait until the second glass before you light up. Wouldn't want to overpower the wine, now would we?

For those interested in more information, check out importer Premium Port Wines on the Web at www.premiumport.com.

—Skids Poppe



Vineyards of Graham's Malvedos.



Peter Symington (winemaker).



Charles Symington checks the musts at Dow's Quinta do Bomfim.



Fine ports age in traditional wooden casks.



The Dow's Port "barco rabelo."

Photos courtesy of Premium Port Wines