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BLANDY'S COLHEITA MALMSEY 2004

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Madeira is perhaps the world's most improbable wine. Grown on a mountainous subtropical island (Madeira itself lies off the coast of Morocco), it acquired its distinctive semi-oxidative taste from the effects of ageing during long sea voyages, where the extremely hot temperatures to which the barrels were exposed would speed up the maturation process. This has now been replaced by two different methods of recreating these conditions; 'estufagem', or artificially heating the wine, or 'canteiro', in which the producers take advantage of the island's climactic conditions and rely on natural heat and humidity – used for higher-quality wines such as Blandy's Colheita 2004. Made entirely from the Malmsey grape (better known as Malvasia), this is a stunning example of Madeira's sweetest style. Fortified to 20% alcohol, the wine's sizeable 117g/l of residual sugar is kept in check by a bright seam of acidity, ensuring a vibrant freshness.