



New Beginnings

2023 Harvest Report

Douro | Alentejo | Vinho Verde

A new Douro DOC winery

This harvest marked an exciting and seminal moment in our family's commitment to sustainable winemaking and our Douro DOC ambitions. After six years of meticulous planning and building, we finally opened our new low-impact winery, Adega do Ataíde, which is located at our Vilariça Valley estate, Quinta do Ataíde, in the east of the Douro. With an investment of over €12 million, this is one of our family's most ambitious projects and affirms our confidence in the future of premium Douro DOC wines. It is the new home for the red wines that we make from our Quinta do Ataíde and Quinta do Vesúvio estates and our Altano Reserve, Organic Red, and Organic Rosé.

Inspired by our long-term commitment to sustainability and innovation, the winery was designed by an in-house team of architects, engineers, and winemakers to produce wines of the highest quality and to be highly efficient in energy and water use. The roof is bordered with solar panels which produce enough electricity to make the winery energy self-sufficient, while the on-site water treatment facility allows us to use both captured rainwater and treated wastewater. The winery has already been approved for the LEED certification process (*Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design*) which will make it the first LEED certified winery in Portugal and the first in the world to attain the comprehensive LEED v4 level, which addresses energy efficiency, water conservation, site selection, material selection, day lighting and waste reduction.

Making use of the sloping terrain, this is a gravity flow winery that allows for a noninterventionist movement of grapes, musts, and wine around the building, avoiding the use of mechanical pumps. The fermentation tanks are fitted with an air-mixing feature, which injects air to create an ascending movement in the must, acting as a natural pumping over system that saves energy and benefits the quality of the wine. This is truly a dream winery for any winemaker and gives us tremendous scope for producing the finest wines from the Douro.

2023 was our debut vintage and I am very impressed by how our winemaking team adapted to working with the new state-of-the-art equipment, and the quality of the wines that we produced this harvest. The first 10 days were dedicated to running trials, equipment testing and fine-tuning procedures. While we encountered a few teething problems, the team was quick to find solutions and soon settled into a good rhythm for the rest of the harvest. This new winery hasn't just delivered what we had hoped for, it's surpassed all our expectations and we are excited by the opportunities it will give us in future.

We started our Douro DOC project from scratch in 1999 and, over the last two decades, we have developed an exciting portfolio of wines from the region – selling almost 270,000 cases in 2022.

However, the Douro faces a significant challenge, with an outdated regulatory system allowing grapes for Douro DOC wine to be transacted on an open market, often below cost of production with excess supply. By comparison, port production is highly regulated through the *benefício* system. This is impacting the socio-economic sustainability of the region and the future of Douro wines in international markets. We believe that it is through innovative projects like our new Ataíde winery – and the positive impact that it will have on the quality of our premium wines – which will allow us to project the reality of our region and the value of its wines, with the goal of growing the Douro DOC category. Nevertheless, without a new regulatory system that covers port and Douro DOC, the imbalance will persist.

Douro harvest: high expectations

Following a succession of challenging harvests in the Douro with prolonged heatwaves, droughts, and low yields, on the eve of the 2023 harvest we were well placed to have one of the highest quality vintages in recent years.

This year's growth cycle has been largely favourable, with abundant rainfall through the winter and late spring replenishing the soil water reserves, after one of the driest years in 2022. While much of southern Europe experienced intense heatwaves over the summer, Portugal was largely spared. July temperatures for the whole country were close to normal, while the Douro was fractionally below average. Although there was no rainfall in the Douro in July and almost none in August, the combination of good soil moisture and moderate temperatures, sustained the vines and provided excellent conditions for gradual maturations, good levels of acidity and positive phenolic development.

Our ability to maximise the potential of conditions like these and harvest the grapes at just the right moment is always conditional on a carefully planned picking schedule, agile vineyard and winery teams, and favourable weather. While we had some perfectly timed rain at the beginning of September, which had a positive effect on the development of colour, tannins and aromas in the wines made in the first few weeks of the month, the weather turned against us in the final stages of the harvest.

Fortunately, however, most of our Touriga Nacional and some of our finest plots of Touriga Franca had advanced maturations and good phenolic ripening, meaning we could harvest them before the heavy rain fell. Although 2023 may not have been the exceptional harvest that we were expecting, after tasting the wines I am very pleased with the quality of what we have made – particularly from our estates in the Cima Corgo sub-region. The best wines are beautifully balanced with excellent colour and freshness.

An early and positive start

We started our 2023 harvest on August 21st by picking our high altitude Viosinho white grapes from two estates above 500 metres – Quinta das Netas in the Pinhão Valley and the Tapadinha vineyard in the Rio Torto Valley. With very good levels of acidity and quantities 10% above our estimates, this was a great start to the vintage. In this first week, we also picked Tinta Roriz at Quinta do Ataíde, used to make our Altano Rosé.

From August 29th, we began picking select parcels of Sousão, Tinta Amarela, and the old, mixed vines from our Douro Superior estates and Dow's Quinta do Bomfim and Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos and Quinta do Tua in the Cima Corgo.

As we prepared to harvest our red grapes in earnest, we were dealt a great hand with perfectly timed rain on September 3rd (12.4mm at Bomfim). This was followed by a week of dry, sunny weather, which gave us ideal conditions for picking the earlier ripening varieties – Alicante Bouschet, Tinta Barroca and old, mixed vines. These gave good fermentations with good colour and Baumés generally around 13°.

We experienced a second bout of rain on September 9th, with 20.6mm registered at Bomfim over three days. This brought the total rainfall for the first 11 days of September up to 33.6mm – this is the equivalent of a full month's rain at Bomfim, according to the 30-year average. As a result, we paused picking and assessed the state of the vines and ripening of the grapes. Despite the short, sharp bursts of rain, we still had good conditions for maturations to continue favourably.

Dry, sunny weather returned, and we harvested our finest parcels of Touriga Nacional at most of our estates in these ideal conditions. We had *lagares* between 13-14° Baumé with excellent colour and fantastic aromas. We picked the Stone Terraces at Malvedos (delivering an impressive *lagar*) and a few parcels of Touriga Franca just in time to avert another volley of rainfall.

Tipping point

The third period of rain came in mid-September (15, 16 & 17) which was considerably more than what we had expected. On one day we recorded 32mm at Bomfim. Fortunately, we had already harvested our best Touriga Nacional before it fell, and what remained to be picked was still in good condition due to advanced maturations. Although the volume of rain was considerable, it was mostly limited to heavy, short-lived thunderstorms which had less impact on the vines.

We were quite apprehensive as we started picking the late-ripening Touriga Franca. Although Baumés were indeed a little short of ideal, the skins of the Francas released a lot of colour and good flavours due to the phenolic development progressing well through the month, despite the rain.

Assessment

On balance, we have had a very good vintage and have made some great wines up until the third week of September – particularly in the Cima Corgo sub-region of the Douro. The wines are balanced, with good levels of acidity underpinning freshness. The Touriga Nacional performed especially well with good maturations and near perfect phenolic ripeness.

While the third period of rain did have some impact of the full potential of the Touriga Franca, the absence of extreme heat (experienced in recent years) and the good level of soil moisture through July and August allowed maturations to continue progressing over the summer, when often they can stop. As a result, the phenolics were predominantly ripe by the time we harvested the Franca in September.

Total production across our estates in the Douro was 30% above 2022. However, when compared to the last decade, 2023 was an average-sized vintage. Yields per vine across our quintas was 1.15 Kg (ten-year average: 1,06 Kg).

Alentejo – Quinta da Fonte Souto

Our 2023 harvest began at Quinta da Fonte Souto in the Alto Alentejo on the 7th August with the picking of the estate's white Verdelho grapes. This is the earliest harvest at Fonte Souto in the last 20 years. Fortunately, this early start was not a result of the heatwaves experienced by much of Europe this summer. Portugal was largely spared of the extreme weather. Instead, we had an early growth cycle brought about by a wet winter and unseasonably warm spring, with maturations progressing at a good pace (even and gradual) and resulting in very balanced ripening. The last grapes came into the winery on October 13th, meaning we had an unprecedented two-month long harvest at the estate.

Our vineyard and winery teams planned the harvest carefully with selective picking of specific rows of vineyard at just the right level of maturity. We had twice the monthly average rainfall and took the bold decision to pause picking several times to allow the vines to benefit from the rain and to wait for drier, warmer weather to return. This paid off and we had fantastic conditions for ripening in the final stages of the harvest.

The vintage at Fonte Souto has been very impressive, with the white grapes in particular showing great promise. The moderate conditions this year have given rise to fresh, aromatic, well-structured and balanced wines.

Vinho Verde – Casa de Rodas

We had a short debut harvest at our new property – Casa de Rodas – in the Monção and Melgaço sub-region of the Vinho Verde DOC. This was our first harvest since acquiring the property in 2022, which was followed by the creation of a joint venture with legendary Vinho Verde producer, Anselmo Mendes, to produce and distribute the wines from this historic estate.

Our viticulture team liaised with Anselmo Mendes in the lead up to and during the harvest, at which point the grapes were taken to his winery to produce our first wines from the property. We have produced some good quality Alvarinho wines and look forward to assessing them over the coming months before releasing them for the first time.

Charles Symington, Head Winemaker & Production Director
