

INTO THE HEAT

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“In Alentejo, sustainability is not just a buzzword; it is a means of survival in one of Europe’s most climatically vulnerable regions. The three so-called pillars of sustainability—economic, social, environmental—are truly interconnected and load-bearing.”

Nick Breeze 2024

FOREWORD

Back in 2005 when I began taking a serious interest in wine tasting, the focus was very much on the wine itself, wine pleasures, wine history and wine culture. Soon after, in 2009, I began a long journey of learning about the changes occurring in the climate system. It is the convergence of these subjects of wine and climate that have shaped my work today.

The recent increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme climate impacts is making itself felt in every region of the world. Sustainability is the umbrella term beneath which a wide range of strategies and skillsets are being developed to ensure the stability of the long-established three pillars: environment, social and economic.

With land use sectors responsible for ~20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, they face the challenge of reducing emissions, as well as removing carbon from the atmosphere. The task ahead is gargantuan, requiring us to move as collective collaborators, identifying less as competitors. Sharing knowledge makes us agile, enabling us to adapt and build resilience faster. Scientists say climate changes are moving against us at an exponential rate. Our response must also be exponential.

For context, Alentejo represents ~0.3% of global vineyard area. Wine production represents ~1% of global agriculture, so the regions impact at the global level is tiny. However, if we consider Alentejo as a laboratory where academics, engineers, ecologists and viticulturists are able to collaborate, researching and disseminating the changes that we need to see in the world, then the threshold of viability for life as we know it, is extended.



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There are a growing number of these laboratories in many other wine regions around the world also engaged in these challenges. Forums for sharing knowledge are emerging across the internet and in conferences. The successes I witnessed in Alentejo offer qualified hope for the future.

At the most recent UN climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan, I met ecologists working on projects that are colossal in scale. What struck me was that the processes they are developing, including: large-scale engineering of river systems, nurturing soil, protecting biodiversity, using data and machine learning to create digital twins of landscapes, are all in the same vein as what I have seen being deployed in Alentejo. This validated my emerging belief that what works at the local level has huge potential for being scaled up to help reverse climate change and protect biodiversity and communities.

It is with enormous gratitude that I have been given the opportunity to visit and speak with many of the sustainably certified wine producers in the Alentejo region. By now many people have heard of the Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme (WASP) because of the growing number of awards they have been picking up in recognition of their achievements.

From my first conversation with WASP Director, João Barroso, we established common ground in our disdain for greenwashing and I accepted the commission on a mutual understanding that I would be free to report with sincerity. I hope this is reflected in this ebook, which contains the insights of many experts whom I have had the privilege to converse with.

Circling back to 2005 and the pleasures of wine, these recent experiences have impacted me such that now, when I sip wine, I feel more than ever that this fine product of the soils, ecosystems, climate and communities, is not just a part of our human story but a critical part of the solution to finding our pathway to the future. Needless to say, this document is best perused with a glass of sustainably produced wine from Portugal's mesmerising Alentejo region.

Thank you.



“It was 14th July 2022. Here where we are, I have a picture on my phone of the thermometer in the car with 47°C. That’s a lot of heat. The soil was 67°C. The rocks were burning...it was insane!”

Marco Laranjo, Vineyard Manager,
João Portugal Ramos

INTO THE HEAT INTRODUCTION

This ebook and interview series, titled ‘Into The Heat’, aims to show what can be done to regenerate the landscapes and ecosystems in Alentejo where scientists forecast average temperature rises of up to +6 in coming decades.

I have focussed primarily on practices in the vineyards, the social dynamics of sustainability and how they connect to the economic challenges that wine producers are facing in the region. I have avoided technical evaluations of carbon counting and emissions reduction that are also a critical part of the certification process. By focusing on tangible practices and interactions, I hope that a clear and positive story emerges in what is often a difficult subject to engage with.

Based on a two week road-trip (and 30 interviews), this project explores how southern Portugal’s Alentejo region is embracing science, fostering knowledge-sharing, strengthening communities, and building resilience against rising temperatures that threaten its cultural identity.

After the first week of travelling across the region with João Barroso, director of WASP, we were joined for the second week by author and TV wine presenter, Janet Wang, and world-renowned climatologist, Professor Jason Box. Their insights and expertise provided perspectives that are included in this study.

Building on my initial project brief, I aim to look beyond the Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme stamp found on wine labels. This stamp signifies producers actively working toward measurable outcomes, showcasing their genuine commitment to sustainable practices.



JOÃO BARROSO, WASP DIRECTOR: LEADING THE WAY

In all my interactions with João since we first spoke in 2020, he has consistently answered my questions about the programme with clear and tangible examples. His un-said motto is 'let the work speak for itself' ...and it does, in volumes.

As an outsider looking in, João's core strength is his leadership. This entails convincing so many producers to trust him on this journey into a new paradigm of thinking about agriculture in a climatically stressed region.

His relentless work ethic and delegation skills mean that the region has a cohesive approach to tackling issues relating to sustainability, turning competitors into collaborators. Growers and Producers across Alentejo habitually share their learned successes and their failures, enabling the overall sustainable development of the region to accelerate.

Listen to the full interview by scanning or clicking on the QRcode on the end of the page.



"I really believe there is going to be a natural selection by consumers and by gatekeepers... eliminating the products that do not present honest, credible, transparent set of characteristics with regard to the claims they put on their products."

João Barroso, Wines of Alentejo Sustainability
Programme (WASP) Director



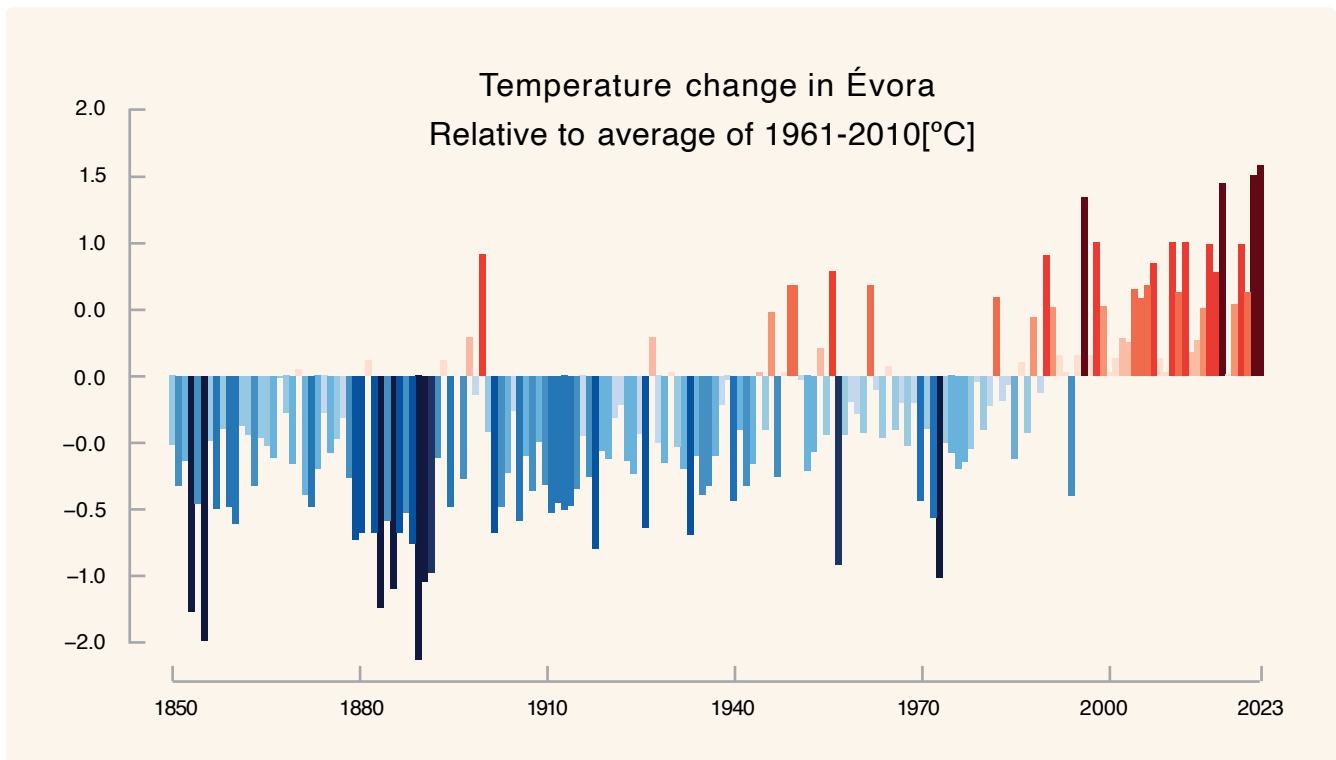
Scan or click on
the QR code to Listen
the full interview



“It’s not just reaching the certification; every year for 5 years you are audited by us and a third party; it is work-in-progress that aims for continuous improvement of the work-in-progress.”

João Barroso, Wines of Alentejo Sustainability
Programme (WASP) Director





ALENTEJO CLIMATE FEATURES

The Climate Stripes graphic above was created especially for this project by Professor Ed Hawkins at the University of Reading in the UK. It represents an output of temperature data for the town of Evora, the regional centre of Alentejo. The chart shows how the mean average temperature has risen over the years, based on average temperature data in centigrade between 1961 and 2010.

Note the steep rise that begins in the 1980's. This equates to the same period when scientists started to notice the decline of sea ice covering the northern polar Arctic Ocean.

Speaking with Portuguese climate scientist, Francisco Ferreira, following our chance meeting at COP29 in Baku, he stressed that Alentejo is on course for +6°C average temperature rise above the preindustrial average, in coming decades.

As the average temperature rises, it increases the intensity, duration and frequency of extremes. For example, the 5 days at ~43-45°C in 2018 could well increase to 10-15 days at 48°C by 2035. The question then becomes: What is the threshold of viability for being sustainable in a climate well beyond the safe limit for human endurance?



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Temperature Rise: Significant temperature increases have been recorded, with a marked rise in the average annual temperature. In some scenarios, temperatures could increase by 2-6°C by the end of the century, especially under the “worst-case” climate scenarios, which is our current trajectory based on global carbon emissions.

Heatwaves and Climatic Extremes: Alentejo has experienced more frequent and intense heatwaves, particularly in recent decades, feeding into longer, harsher drought periods.

Rainfall Changes: Rainfall has generally decreased, with studies showing reductions of up to 15-20% in annual precipitation since the 1970s. There is also a noticeable shift in seasonal rainfall patterns, with less autumn and spring precipitation.

Drought Frequency: Droughts have become more frequent and prolonged. The Alentejo region is increasingly susceptible to arid conditions, exacerbated by higher temperatures and reduced rainfall. This trend is expected to continue, worsening water scarcity.

All of the above will get worse as long as carbon emissions continue to rise. In 2024 the global pledges for emissions reductions added up to equal almost double what the best science says is the safe upper limit. The current trajectory, aka ‘Business As Usual’ (BAU), is regarded by experts as catastrophic.



“Ecosystem carbon is a way of making up for past deforestation. We need an agriculture that supports climate stability.”

Prof. Kimberly Nicholas, Sustainability scientist,
University of Lund, Sweden

PROF. KIMBERLY NICHOLAS: REGENERATIVE VITICULTURE

Professor Kimberly Nicholas is a sustainability scientist originally from California, today based at the University of Lund in Sweden.

We recorded an interview early in 2024, on research Kimberly and colleagues published asking whether regenerative viticulture increases soil carbon.

The results led Kimberly to say with confidence that regenerative practices do increase soil carbon, saying: “...we certainly can’t wait for years of further research. We need agriculture to be part of the solution now!”

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR KIMBERLY NICHOLAS

Lifespan of Soil Carbon in Agriculture

One of the key areas of ongoing research is understanding the lifespan or long-term trajectory of carbon once it is sequestered in agricultural soils. This understanding is crucial to assessing the effectiveness of regenerative practices in mitigating climate change.

Criticism of Carbon Credits

Professor Nicholas criticised carbon credits that allow fossil fuel polluters to pay to continue polluting. Instead, she emphasised the importance of finding ways to incentivise farmers to increase soil carbon, making agriculture part of the climate solution.



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the QR code to Listen
the full interview

Defining Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture is often loosely defined, either by specific practices or by the outcomes it aims to achieve. This ambiguity can hinder the development of standardised methods and policies to support regenerative efforts.

Need for Farmer-Driven Evidence

There is a pressing need for more evidence from farmers to determine what can be effectively measured and applied. This evidence can help guide other farmers in adopting regenerative practices that improve soil carbon.

Science-Informed Policy for Practitioners

Professor Nicholas underscored the importance of policy being informed by the best available science to allocate resources efficiently. Such policies should be practical and usable by agricultural practitioners to support sustainable practices.





REGENERATIVE PRACTICES IN ALENTEJO

Regenerative farming in Alentejo focuses on enhancing soil health through several key practices. Minimal or no-till farming helps maintain soil structure, promotes healthy microbes, and reduces erosion.

Cover cropping is crucial in this drought-prone region, as it protects against erosion, retains soil moisture, and supports beneficial microorganisms year-round.

The integration of livestock through managed grazing improves soil structure, enhances carbon storage, and provides natural fertilisation with manure.

Increasing organic matter by adding compost and plant residues enriches the soil with nutrients, improves its structure, and boosts moisture retention.

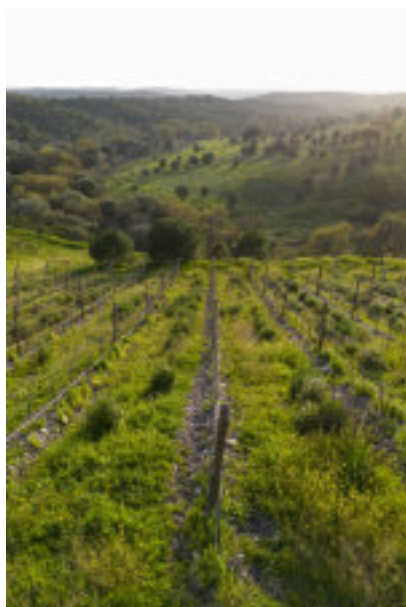
Promoting soil biodiversity fosters diverse microorganisms, which enhances nutrient cycling and overall soil health, leading to more resilient crops and better yields.



“You have to do a lot of thinking about the bigger picture, about the whole ecological impact. Human intervention in different parts of the world is something we should embrace if it is done in the right way.”

Janet Wang,
Author and TV wine commentator

JANET WANG: PARALLELS IN WINEMAKING & ARTICULATING SUSTAINABILITY



Having previously enjoyed several conversations with author and TV wine pundit, Janet Wang, I was pleased when she agreed to join João, Jason and I for the second week of the Alentejo road-trip visiting certified producers.

While reading Janet’s book *A Chinese Wine Renaissance*, I was struck by the immense human effort required in northern China, where growers bury their vines each winter to protect them from plunging temperatures as low as -20°C.

When I raised this in our interview, Janet replied, “We are slightly afraid of the word intervention. It is about intervention in the right way ...human intervention in a measured and calculated way is essential.”

What Janet brought to our tour was the insight of parallels between two very distant regions. Where estates were experimenting with creating organic microbial rich teas to boost the overall soil health, Janet compared this to Chinese medicine that she saw producers in China using to boost the health of their own vineyards.

Whilst we listened to the WASP-certified producers demonstrate how they are developing their techniques, and later reflected on these stories, we were ourselves, as communicators, learning to articulate what resilience to climate change really looks like in practice.



Scan or click on
the QR code to Listen
the full interview

Hear more of Janet's observations from Alentejo and drawn parallels with her experience of visiting wine regions in China by listening to the full interview via the resource page.

“You can really see the challenges they are facing. I really loved how wild the vineyards looked ...this is for real and not for show.”

Janet Wang, Author
and TV wine commentator

“The shoots are free to cover the grapes from the sun. If we have lots of heat, the first thing that will burn is the leaves. We have good control of the irrigation, so we can protect the leaves. It's a fight but we protect the production.”

Marco Laranjo, Vineyard Manager,
João Portugal Ramos





“It’s really impressive because they’re winning ...it’s not just talking about the issues but doing something and winning ...the Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme ...amazing!”

Prof. Jason Box, Climatologist, Geological
Survey of Denmark & Greenland

PROF. JASON BOX: USING DATA TO PUSH THE THRESHOLD OF VIABILITY

I first encountered the work of Professor Jason Box in an award winning documentary titled, ‘Chasing Ice’ screened in the UK House of Commons in 2012.

Jason’s work, deploying and analysing data collecting instruments across the surface of the Greenland Ice Sheet, has helped advance our understanding of how the kilometres-thick ice sheet is melting from within, as the atmosphere heats up. Since then we have met many times at climate conferences and other places, recording interviews on how the Greenland Ice Sheet fits into the global climate system.

Bringing a climate ice scientist into the heat meant that Jason could offer a uniquely informed perspective on the cause-effect-response of the climate change and sustainability efforts in Alentejo.

When we first spoke on the phone and Jason looked at the climate data for the region, he remarked, “Aren’t these producers just fighting gravity?” However, after just two days in the region, that view altered.

One observation that he seized on was the deployment of a wide range of sensors collecting data. The heat spikes, drought and overall climate impacts were advancing as stated earlier but the producers and the communities in Alentejo were adapting.

As Jason scanned the landscape he was able to identify the interactions between climate and the defences being employed, including cover crops, trees to act as wind breaks, sun-shading leaf growth and other initiatives.



Scan or click on
the QR code to Listen
the full interview



He pointed out that the investment in sensors was building a data rich landscape that could further play an important role in boosting resilience in future scenarios. For example, where estate owners are restoring waterways channeling runoff into the artificial lakes to be stored for drier periods, sensors can be used to measure rates of evaporation over the lakes during a drought or intense heatwave.

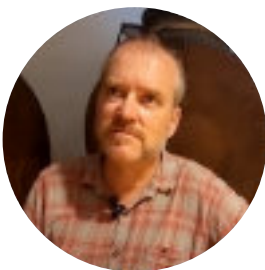
In recent years, there have been incidences of around five days of temperatures at 45°C (113°F). In twenty years time, this could be two, three or even four weeks at this temperature. The question thus becomes: can we extend that threshold of viability further by reducing evaporation across the entire estate? This might mean deploying covers over lakes where the dams are located. Can this be done in a way that supports ecology?

The dammed areas are also biodiversity hotspots. Wildlife searching for water will also need shade. The combined role of data, machine learning technology and human intervention takes on a fully integrated role in restoring and managing the landscape.



This advanced mapping technique, known as ‘digital twinning,’ can combine detailed site data with climate projections for Alentejo’s increasingly challenging conditions. By integrating variables such as soil characteristics, water availability, and temperature patterns with viticultural data—including grape variety performance and biodiversity indicators—growers can develop more climate-resilient vineyard strategies. This digital modelling helps inform critical decisions, from selecting drought-tolerant grape varieties to identifying optimal planting sites and managing increasingly scarce water resources.

Research is underway advancing these practices in different institutions. These efforts offer hope that, as temperatures continue to rise, together we will be able to further extend the threshold of viability underpinning local communities and economies.



“In a more data-rich environment there are more opportunities to study complexity in ways to optimise production and quality. So as a climatologist, I think there are interesting opportunities to bring data science into this in the context of hydro climatology.”

Prof. Jason Box, Climatologist, Geological
Survey of Denmark & Greenland



3 PILLARS OF SUSTAINABILITY

PILLAR 1: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY



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the full interview

PILLAR 1: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Alentejo is the least populated region of Portugal. The extreme cold in winter contrasts with the long hot summers. The landscape has a wildness to it that is often not so appealing to young families looking to settle. The wine estates have to go beyond offering seasonal work, or even full-time employment. Without a sufficient number of workers, the estates cannot operate. The social pillar of sustainability is critical to wine production but the communities wellbeing is directly linked to the regions ability to survive and continue building resilience as temperatures rise.

On several estates we visited, we saw that several generations of a family maybe employed within the business. Producers offer healthcare and a range of family support services that make life in Alentejo more attractive for employees.

Estate owners invest in transport services to ensure workers can travel to work in what are remote rural areas.



“We’ve been here for 5 or 6 generations ...many of our workers are also here for more than one generation. We prioritise workers from the local town. In Baleizão [local village] at least 75 families work on the estate.”

Pedro Schmidt,
CEO, Paço do Conde



video

“A lot of people working here come from the villages around. We have two buses that pick them up in the morning and take them home in the evening.”

José Luis Moreira,
Chief Operating Officer, Esporão



Herdade do Rocim: Ancient Techniques, Modern Vision

At Herdade do Rocim, sustainability is about preserving centuries-old winemaking traditions while adapting to the realities of climate change.

To manage the hot, dry climate, the winery is focused on water efficiency. They use sensor-driven irrigation systems and conduct real-time soil moisture analysis to determine precise water needs. A key experiment involves splitting a 4-hectare vineyard of Alicante Bouschet, irrigating half while leaving the other dry-farmed, testing the long-term viability of different approaches.



“We want to show that Alentejo wines can be fresh. The markets are looking for this—healthier, lower-alcohol wines that still reflect our terroir.”

Bruno Gomes, Wine Tourism Manager





The captivating ambiance of Alentejo, coupled with the rise in popularity of the region as a tourist destination, has inspired some estate owners to cater for visitors, offering quality restaurants with regional cuisine, as well as a range of different accommodation options. Malhadinha Nova, Mainova, Herdade dos Grous and Quinta do Paral all offer exceptional winemaking coupled with stylishly designed hotel experiences for guests.



These enterprises create jobs, increasing demand for produce, boosting economic benefits for local people. The projects take immense planning as investors often have to invest in local infrastructure, such as housing and transport, to ensure workers and their families are also benefiting from the activities.

Malhadinha Nova and Quinta do Paral



“We bought this property totally abandoned...there was nobody working anymore for about 40-50 years. We hired the first couple in 1999 and they are still here. Today we employ 100 people. I think we are helping young people in the interior of Alentejo believe that it's possible to build a family here. It is part of the human sustainability.”

João Soares, Owner, Malhadinha Nova



“We are opening a new hotel and 95% of the people who work at Quinta do Paral are from here, from Vidigueira, from Vila de Frades. The owner has invested a lot of money into the town and it is important to help the people grow.”

Luis Leão, Head Winemaker,
Quinta do Paral



[video](#)



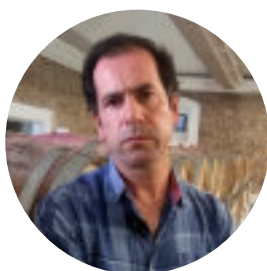
“We want to be very involved in the community in terms of social help. To keep young people in the region, we have a scholarship programme for the children of our employees to help with the university.”

Alexandre Relvas Jr.,
CEO Casa Relvas

Alexandre Relvas from Casa Relvas told me about the scholarship programme that they founded in 2018 in order to help finance the children of their employees through their higher education either at Universities in Alentejo or outside the region.

With climate change increasing median temperatures that bring forward harvest dates, many estates have to begin harvesting in July, through the extreme heat of August, into September. At Cartuxa, Duarte Lopes says, “We have increased the harvesting during the night otherwise it is impossible to maintain people working after midday or one in the afternoon ...the heat is just too much. It is just one example of adaptation but it is important otherwise we have health problems ...people fainting.”

Cartuxa belongs to the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation whose objective is to develop cultural and social aspects of society. Cartuxa's state of the art winery, produces 5.5M bottles of wine per year, ranging between €2 supermarket wines, to acclaimed bottles, retailing for hundreds of euros. The money raised from the sale of wine enables the foundation to fulfil its objectives.



“We have more than 200 people working here. Sometimes a whole family - the mother, father and even the son or daughter - will work with us. During harvest we can have a hundred more people working for 3 months. Of course it is a strong input to the social network of this area.”

Duarte Lopes, Winemaker, Cartuxa



João Portugal Ramos: Beyond the Vine – Building Sustainable Communities in Alentejo

What began as a modest family venture three decades ago is today the municipality's largest employer, with 140 staff members. As we walk outside to see the vineyard, we see a employee who is celebrating her last day. João congratulates her before turning to me to say she was working here when he was born. It is not uncommon for multiple members of a family to be employed by the wine estate.

The winery has taken active steps to spread sustainable practices throughout their grower community. They have hired a dedicated engineer to work with grape suppliers, helping them adopt more sustainable methods. This investment strengthens community bonds while improving wine quality. Even during market fluctuations, they maintain fair pricing practices with growers, often paying above-market rates during downturns to ensure the community's economic stability.



“And we have a social responsibility that I think is quite important. So in a small city, we are the first, the biggest employer of this municipality. We feel that we must have our employees as happy as possible...When it goes well, we want everyone to be happy and to get a proper part of the company profits.”

João Portugal Ramos Jr.



BORBA

As a subregion of Alentejo, Borba's wine history dates back to the Roman period in the 1st/2nd century AD with a reputation for winemaking that brought prosperity to the region. During our visit, Helena, takes us to a small museum where they have a collection of 'Talha', the clay pots that are being revived as winemaking vessels today. In Borba the tradition of 'Fazer as Onze' still exists. It is the cultural practice of eating and drinking local wines with members of the community.

At Adega de Borba, a local cooperative created in 1955, it is impressive to see how the challenges of sustainability have been internalised across the 230 growers. The average size of land under vine, per grower, is 8ha. 150 of the growers are now certified sustainable covering 80% of the 2300ha of vineyard area.



"In Borba and Estremoz...we have a custom called 'making the eleven'. Before lunch we go to places where the owner produces their wines in talha. We taste the wines and eat typical food from the region. Afterwards the owner will bottle some wines for consumers."

Helena Ferreira, Director of Production & Quality, Adega de Borba



“I say that our associates [growers] are different because they wear the shirt, they are owners of the project and they know the decisions we make in the vineyards are very important to sell the wine, also for the environment and for our social purposes. Obviously they must have economic sustainability ...If they make money doing these changes, they will do it.”

Luis Gaspar, Vineyard &
Associate Manager,
Adega de Borba



video

There are thousands of families directly dependent on the success of Adega de Borba. This meant that the transition to working sustainably had to be managed inclusively, incentivising growers to participate. Although there is a financial reward for the price of certified grapes sold to the co-op, Luis Gaspar says it required a mental paradigm shift to make such significant changes. This includes widespread knowledge sharing, organising workshops, both in-person or remotely via webinars.

The establishment of trust is the bedrock of this project. The state of the art winery was funded by both the EU and from the growers themselves, accepting lower prices for their grapes whilst the development took place.

This investment across the stakeholders has created momentum for change that directly benefits the growers financially in the long-term but also reduces impacts on the environment whilst increasing resilience to future climate changes.



Head winemaker at Adega de Borba, Oscar Gato, discussing the heritage of talha winemaking.



Cartuxa: People-First Approach Driving Premium Production

Rising temperatures have prompted significant operational changes. Night harvesting has increased, and traditional hand-picking schedules now avoid intense afternoon heat when temperatures exceed 30°C, prioritising worker well-being while maintaining quality standards.

Cartuxa demonstrates that sustainability enhances premium wine production, producing 5.5 million bottles annually, including over 1 million bottles above €20 and their flagship Pêra Manca at €350. Their comprehensive approach includes underground irrigation, efficient cleaning systems, organic farming, and cover crops.



video

“Today, in the vineyards we are organic and ...we can produce something in this organic way, more sustainable, but the quality, it’s there!”

Duarte Lopes, Winemaker.



PILLAR 2: ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY



“In the domestic market we are growing back to the numbers we had in 2019 but with higher costs, they don’t compensate the inflation, I would say the producers are not having the same profit as they did in the past.”

Francisco Mateus,
Wines of Alentejo Commission
President (2015-2025)

Pillar 2: Economicsustainability

I spoke with Alentejo’s Wine Commission President (2015-2025), Francisco Mateus, about a range of conflicting factors that make the current economic outlook of the region more challenging.

Economic sustainability is as important as the environmental and social pillars of sustainability. It is the economics of the wine business that sustain the communities, the social programmes, the environmental interventions, ongoing research and development, and just about every aspect of the organisational ecosystem.

The economic challenges Alentejo is faced with are reflected in regions across Europe and the world, with a complex range of factors impacting production and consumption. In Alentejo these include: increased production whilst costs from inflation rise and shrinking consumer demand, negatively hit profit margins.

What emerges from my conversations with a number of certified producers and Francisco Mateus, is that in more advanced markets like Scandinavia, Canada, and increasingly in the UK, having robust sustainability credentials is an important factor in gaining market access.



[Scan or click on
the QR code to Listen
the full interview](#)



“We have tenders that only sustainably certified wines can apply to. They consider wine quality and sustainability, so, it is plus-plus for us. It is what we are aiming for. There are a lot of people doing good things in Portuguese wine, so it is up to our team to develop our knowledge for a better place and better wine. It is fundamental.”

Rita Marques, Head of quality, Paço dos Infantes



[video](#)



“We had many signals from the market; we won this new tender in Sweden at the beginning of the year. It is because we have this stamp of the Wines of Alentejo Sustainability Programme. We are showing to the final client: this is true, this is an honest programme and we are putting on the table an honest product!”

Helena Manuel,
Herdade dos Lagos

Alentejo is a relatively tiny wine producing area with 0,2-0,3% of the global land area of vineyards. Despite this, it has picked up a range of prestigious international awards and is recognised as a global leader in sustainable wine production.

Extreme climate impacts are now touching all of our lives, either directly or through the mainstream news or social media. If we can highlight in our storytelling, the methods and practices that promote a better environment for all, then the natural selection for products made sustainably, as I quoted João Barroso as saying earlier, has an increased chance of becoming a reality.

Speaking with Luis Patrão from Coelheiros, he said being sustainable is itself a limiting factor for production; forcing us to live within our means. The balance between being economically and environmentally viable can be hard to attain.

In the next section are the main points that I noted from my interview with Francisco Mateus (also available to listen to).



[video](#)



“As a consumer, I feel better when I buy a product that I know is sustainable. Everyone talks about being sustainable but I think it is important for things to be measured. This programme has been acknowledged by the most strict monopolies in the world. Consumers trust this certification ... There are a lot of certifications but not all of them are real.”

João Portugal Ramos Jr.



Paço dos Infantes: Building a Future-Proof Wine Estate

Paço do Infante represents a new generation of Alentejo wine producers where sustainability is woven into the fabric of operations across their 400 hectare estate. Their approach focuses on measurable outcomes and continuous improvement.

The estate utilises sensors for soil and weather measurements to optimise water usage. They consistently operate below their allocated water limits from Alqueva, demonstrating efficiency in a water-stressed region.

Adaptation to climate change drives their vineyard strategy, with careful selection of rootstocks and varieties that are more efficient at accessing water. The team also considers vineyard orientation as a key factor in protecting vines from intense sun exposure.

Their biggest challenge and current focus is biodiversity enhancement; working to identify and catalogue native species, creating better habitats while maintaining agricultural productivity.

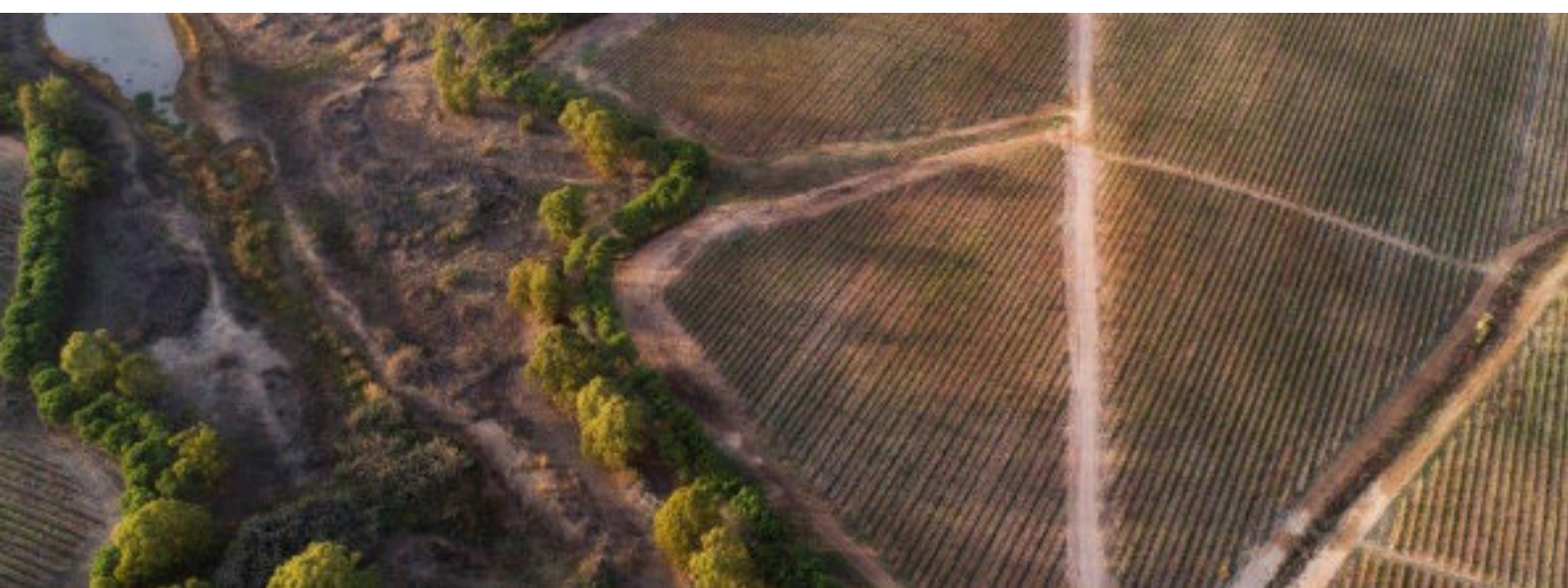


“With or without certification, we are working on this...I think we all agree that it’s only like this that we can do better and we can stay here for more years.”

Rita Marques, Head of Quality Control



[video](#)



[video](#)

THE ECONOMIC PRESSURES ON ALENTEJO'S WINE REGION AND THE RISING EMPHASIS ON SUSTAINABILITY:

1 Increased Vineyard Area and Production

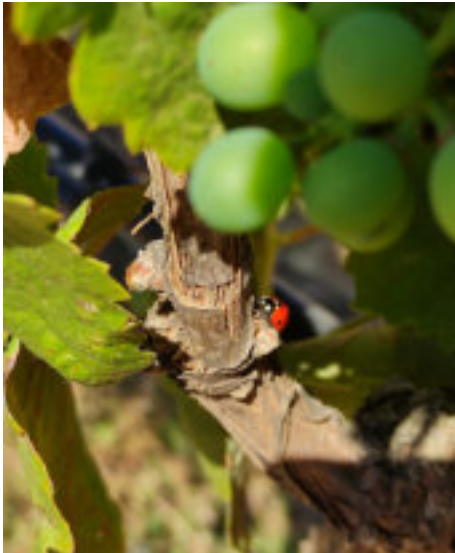
- Vineyard area expanded by 20% from 2019 to 2023.
- Grape production up 7% over 5 yrs, producing 6.6 tonnes per hectare.
- Wine production grew by 6%, reaching 130M litres annually

2 Sales Decline Amid Production Growth

- Overall trade decreased by 9% between 2019-2023.
- Domestic sales down by 7%; exports were mostly stable, slightly down by 1%.
- 2023–2024 saw a 12% drop in export volume, despite strong performance in prior years.

3 Decreased Wine Prices and Rising Costs

- Bulk wine prices fell by 30% in 2024.
- Inflation rose by 16% since COVID-19, increasing production costs while sales lag.
- Crisis distillation required in recent years due to surplus production.



Malhadinha Nova: From Abandoned Land to Wine Excellence

Malhadinha Nova represents a remarkable transformation of abandoned land into a thriving wine estate, where sustainability and premium wine production are inextricably linked. The estate's evolution from barren terrain to a vibrant 75-hectare vineyard showcases how thoughtful water management can revitalise an entire ecosystem.

Their approach to grape variety selection incorporates traditional varieties like Antão Vaz alongside carefully chosen varieties such as Alvarinho and Baga, selected specifically for their ability to maintain natural acidity in Alentejo's challenging climate.



“We were sure that we would only want to do top quality wine...producing small quantities in an organic certified way, picking everything by hand, learning year after year, when to pick, how to pick, which quantity to pick.”

João Soares, Owner.



[video](#)

4 Tourism Impact on Domestic Sales

- Increased tourist activity has boosted Alentejo wine sales by 6% in Portugal.
- Sales have grown to pre-2019 levels, but profits are lower due to inflation and higher costs.
- 60% of wines in Portugal are sold at 2.75 EUR, appealing to price-conscious consumers.



[video](#)

5 Push for Sustainability as a Market Advantage

- Sustainable, WASP-certified wines are increasingly attractive to consumers and export markets.
- Sustainability helps cut costs (energy, waste, packaging) and allows for lighter wine styles that appeal to modern tastes.
- Certifying wineries (35% production certified) is more achievable than certifying smaller growers.
- Growing demand for sustainable wine in domestic and export markets strengthens Alentejo's position as a potential leader in eco-friendly production.



Herdade da Candeeira: Expanding Without Compromising Quality

At Herdade da Candeeira, sustainability isn't just about environmental responsibility—it's about building a viable business. The first Alentejo estate was purchased in 2014. Vineyard expansion was essential to achieving financial and operational sustainability. The winery now cultivates 70 hectares of vineyards, balancing indigenous Portuguese varieties with international selections to create a diverse portfolio of wines.

Candeeira is navigating the complex intersection of sustainability and scale, proving that growth doesn't have to come at the expense of quality or responsibility. Their focus on water efficiency, varietal selection, and precise vineyard management is paving the way for a more resilient, future-proof Alentejo.



“Scaling up isn't just about producing more—it's about balancing different vineyard systems to create stability and long-term sustainability.”

Nuno Morais, CEO



PILLAR 3: ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY



Scan or click on
the QR code to Listen
the full interview

WATER IN ALENTEJO

Alqueva Dam and Lake:

The Alqueva Dam in Portugal is the largest artificial lake in Western Europe (+250 km²). It was built to provide water security for the arid Alentejo region. It is visually striking as the calm body of water sprawls across the landscape. Alqueva's impact on the region is critical.

Water from Alqueva is extensively used to support agricultural irrigation. These include vineyards, olive groves, almond plantations and cereals. It also supplies water to local communities, some of which is then treated and re-used for irrigation.

The dam also produces about 520 GWh of renewable hydroelectric power annually, aligning with Portugal's commitment to green energy.



“It is a scientific fact that water is the bloodstream of the whole planet. All climate related impacts are water related extremes. It is droughts, floods, reinforced typhoons, hurricanes, food and security, all fires – first the water is evaporated and then things burn down.”

Prof. Johanne Rockström, Director,
Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)



Alqueva Dam, Alentejo



When the Alqueva Dam was constructed, it submerged villages and disrupted local ecosystems. However, the new water resources from this large-scale project have since encouraged new biodiversity, with parts of the area now protected for conservation.

The regenerative practices that I saw on the estates I visited illustrate the threats that Prof. Rockström mentioned in the quote at the outset of this section, as well as the comments on intervention made by Janet Wang and the 'winning' with sustainability that Jason Box declared.

Rising temperatures are accelerating evaporation from both oceans and soils, intensifying the water cycle in the atmosphere. In conventionally farmed lands, where bare soils are exposed to extreme heat followed by intense rainfall events, the combination of erosion and crop failure accelerates desertification. The northward expansion of Saharan climate conditions into Southern Europe is already evident, particularly in regions like southern Spain and Portugal, where increasing periods of drought and temperatures above 40°C are transforming once-fertile agricultural lands into semi-arid zones. This process is especially visible in areas where traditional farming methods have depleted soil organic matter, reducing the land's natural resilience to climate extremes.

Images from top-right:

1. Looking across Alqueva from Casa Clara.
2. The Alqueva Dam & lake on Google Earth.

Where regenerative practices are employed, great things are happening. It starts with the restoration of waterways and the reintroduction of plants that create rainwater pathways into the soil when the rain arrives.

The water is channeled into the soil via the plants, rather than flowing across the exposed sunbaked dry surface. It then reaches the vine roots, with excess water continuing toward the dammed catchment area below.

Vineyard manager, Marco Laranjo, stressed that irrigation is only used carefully in the hot periods to ensure plants can continue to drink when otherwise they may shut down.

At Paço do Conde, south of Alqueva, they have built twenty dams over forty years enabling the 4400ha estate to maintain resilience in the heat, extending that threshold of viability. I spoke with João Portugal Ramos Jr. next to an artificial lake on his property. He pointed to nesting areas where endangered species of birds, like the Black Crane, are returning to the region.

In addition to optimising the capture of rainwater, he told me how they were recycling waste water from the nearby town and, after treatment, using it for irrigation.





Paço do Conde: How 20 Strategic Dams Transform an ancient Alentejo Estate

The Paço do Conde estate has taken a longterm approach to water resilience, developed through four decades of strategic planning. At the heart of their water management system lies a network of twenty dams, strategically positioned across the 4,500-hectare estate to create vital water reserves. This careful water stewardship supports grape maturation during the intense summer months, where temperatures can soar to 45°C.

The estate has eliminated soil mobilisation, maintaining natural grass cover between vine rows. They've developed a circular farming system where manure from their thousand-strong cattle herd enriches the soil, improving its structure and water-holding capacity.



“Water is really key business here for us... it's not to produce more, but it's to produce with bigger quality. We irrigate the vineyards a little bit during the summer so that we can help the smooth maturation of the grapes.”

Pedro Schmidt, CEO



[video](#)



At Quinta do Carmo, Rui Vieira and João Chamorro drove us through an old cork oak forest to an elevated view point, looking over a dam with a healthy store of water. Beneath us to the right, the ground reached out before us, an expanse of rugged schist.

Rui explained that here the ecologists were working with engineers and vineyard planners to get permission to create another dam.

The lake would be dug out of the schist bank and the soil moved to where we were standing to become the planting bed for another vineyard.

These practices require in-depth investigation and study. This is a curation of the landscape, carefully planned and executed, as part of a wider adaptation and resilience building effort to take these farmers and local communities, into the climatically unstable decades ahead.



“If we can manage the water - it is so scarce - in future years when it is lacking, a good management of the soil to maintain humidity is very important for us. Also the ascent and orientation to the sun of the slopes is very important so that the heat is not too much for the grapes.”

Alexandra Mendes, Winemaker, Casa Clara

CURATING THE LANDSCAPE: CASA CLARA IN 2021 AND 2024



2021 – Large-scale engineering at Casa Clara to reduce sun exposure and optimise water flow through the vineyard system.



2024 – Landscape is transformed with vines thriving and soil protected with diverse cover crops.



Casa Relvas: Adapting Alentejo's Vineyards to a Changing Climate

At Casa Relvas, vineyards are divided into three categories, each tailored to a specific style of wine. The approach to canopy management is particularly important in mitigating short, intense heat waves—keeping vines shaded and stress levels balanced ensures consistent grape quality.

Relvas employs precision irrigation, guided by vineyard mapping, sensor technology and even daily quad-bike monitoring. These efforts ensure water efficiency while maintaining vine health, even in temperatures reaching 45°C (113°F). The application of white powder sprays helps reflect excess sunlight, reducing vine stress.



“The Alentejo sun makes the wines quite round, true, easy to understand and easy to drink—all this without losing the sense of place, which is something very important.”

Alexandre Relvas Jr., CEO

KEYLINE WATER SYSTEMS

The keyline water management system is well known across many parts of the world where water conservation is critical. I saw several examples on this trip to Alentejo of keyline systems being created or already in use.

Keyline design in vineyards is a water management system that follows natural landscape contours to optimise rainwater distribution.

Terraced slopes and curved planting lines guide the water, slowing runoff and promoting even infiltration across the vineyard, reducing erosion, improving soil fertility, and enhancing water retention. Keyline methods ultimately lead to better water conservation and soil regeneration in vineyard landscapes.



“Our soils are very hard to work. They compact a lot so the water that comes from irrigation or rain, easily runs off and increases erosion. With keyline we build a system parallel to the vineyard, like channels, to allow the water to infiltrate into the soil naturally and feed the plants.”

Helena Manuel, Viticulture manager, Herdade dos Lagos





[video](#)



Quinta do Paral: The 60-Year-Old Vines Defying Climate Change

The estate's approach to climate adaptation is deeply rooted in their old vine heritage. These ungrafted vines, with roots extending up to 50 meters into granite soils, demonstrate remarkable resilience without irrigation. Particularly notable is their Antão Vaz, which achieves higher acidity and lower pH in hot years compared to irrigated vines - a crucial advantage as harvest dates have shifted from September to July over the past 30 years.

The estate's 13 hectares of 60-year-old vines, planted before 1969, represent a living library of Portuguese viticulture.

“The Antão Vaz is an autochthonous grape... On the old vines we have very good acidity. You don't feel the acidity on the mouth, but you feel the freshness, some kind of mineral flavours.”

Luis Leão, Head Winemaker





Herdade dos Grous - mixed grape varieties with photos taken in autumn 2021 and summer 2024.



“Why should our vines live in the desert? They should have the best. If we give them the best they will return to us the best grapes”

Luis Constantino, Vineyard Manager, Herdade dos Grous

In 2021 Luis Constantino, Vineyard Manager at Herdade dos Grous, showed me these recently planted vines (top picture) that were part of his conceived plan to combat the heat and pests. In 2024 the variety of vines are maturing with a thick carpet-like thatch of cover crops. The cork oak trees - a keystone species of biodiversity - are interspersed throughout the vineyard plots.

In this rustic field blend of Portuguese grape varieties, vines are planted with no wires to support them. They are upright and low down. Luis tells me that they had excellent grapes last year and no treatments for two years. In 2024 there was a great deal of rain early in the season causing mildew, so they had to treat them.

He says, “We are planting indigenous varieties in low formation. They are going to protect themselves from insects. It is trying to get back to what is natural. Not just one species in the field but a mixture - it is still a vineyard - but different species of grapes. We are very proud of this project and I believe that in the future we will have to replicate it in another area.

The problem here is that it is more difficult to work everything by hand. The crisis of not having people here to do it is also a problem.”





Adega Mayor: Organic Practices and Vineyard Resilience

Adega Mayor is taking a holistic, organic approach to viticulture, transitioning away from synthetic pesticides. This approach has revealed the true resilience of the vines. Instead of chemical treatments they now rely on botanical extracts, supporting plant immunity and strengthening their resistance to diseases like downy mildew.

A key challenge in Alentejo is rising temperatures and erratic rainfall, with extreme weather events becoming more common. The viticulture management team closely monitors water stress using advanced soil and plant probes, ensuring that irrigation is both efficient and sustainable.



[video](#)

“The main strategy goes with irrigation management and the date of harvest. We are anticipating the harvest to get lower alcohol and more freshness.”

Francisco Pessoa, Head of Viticulture





“We planted this vineyard in 2017. We didn’t take out anything from the landscape. We left all the trees you can see. These are places where the birds and other species can live. In terms of the mosaics that we already had here we just put vineyards where we had leftover space.”

Leonor Frazão,
Winemaker, Fita Preta



[video](#)

AGROFORESTRY - EXPERIMENTAL FRONTIERS IN VITICULTURE

The growing consensus among producers is that resilience comes from greater alignment with nature. At Fita Preta and Esporão, this means layering vineyards over the existing ecosystem, preserving the integrity of what currently is living in the terrain.



“When you immerse the vineyard into the area, I believe you are interfering less with the ecosystem. You already have trees keeping the water, restoring the humidity, connecting with the cover crops, attracting insects that are controlling pests, retaining water in the soil. I believe we are creating conditions which are better for viticulture.”

José Luis Moreira, Chief Operating Officer, Esporão



HOLISTIC APPROACHES

The Alentejo region is famous for weaving and at Tapada de Coelhoiros, winemaker Luis Patrão, describes the estate as a tapestry, composed of different vegetation with different characteristics.

Vineyard Manager, João Raposeira, said they use a variety of plants for cover crops that have different functions to restore organic matter in the soils. During the summer they mulch the vegetation to create a thick thermal barrier, protecting the soil from the intense heat. The temperature difference between ploughed soil and mulch covered soil is 50°C and 30°C respectively - the difference between life and death for the plants root systems during a drought. João says that he observes the plants are adapting, making the cycle of vegetation easier and giving them the strength to survive the droughts. He notes that the fruit produced is more stable with increased phenolic compounds.



“We are trying to figure out what we can get from our forest in order to help our vines. Or, how can our vines help our nut trees? We are trying to figure the best things from each crop, each culture, in order to improve the whole system.”

Luis Patrão, Head Winemaker, Tapada de Coelhoiros



“Regeneration isn’t a quick fix—it’s about creating vineyards that can sustain themselves for generations.”

Renato Neves,
Head of Viticulture

Herdade das Servas: Regenerating the vineyard ecosystem

At Servas, sustainability is about rebuilding the vineyard’s natural balance. The estate has stopped irrigation, instead using regenerative viticulture to create living, thriving soils that can sustain themselves. Permanent cover crops with self-seeding small seeds help retain moisture and improve soil structure, while bacterial activity is carefully stimulated to support vine health.

This is a long-term transformation—it can take 8-10 years for soils to fully regenerate, especially in Alentejo’s extreme climate of heat and sudden downpours. Vineyards previously reliant on synthetic inputs must relearn how to extract micronutrients naturally, deepening their root systems for resilience. By avoiding irrigation, enhancing soil biodiversity, and prioritising natural interactions, Servas is ensuring its vineyards can thrive for generations to come.





“In China I also hear people talk about using biodynamic or even Chinese medicine principals to understand the balance and health of the ecosystem...to make the overall health of the vines and vineyard better.”

Janet Wang, Author and broadcaster



“We are starting to work with our micro-organisms. We took a soil sample from our forest with organic matter and fermented it for thirteen days with organic molasses and seaweed. We use the fermented paste to produce a tea to be applied to the soils.”

João Raposeira, Vineyard Manager, Tapada de Coelhoiros



Adapting to heat

A couple of years ago when I spoke to Iain Reynolds Richardson from iconic Alentejo producer, Mouchão, he pointed out that the old Winkler Scale developed in 1944 to determine the suitability of regions for certain grape varieties based on climate, was being proved obsolete in Alentejo. Producers here were observing changes in the vine as climate heating progresses. The ability of the vine to adapt, nurtured by permaculture or regenerative techniques, is something that Francisco Pessoa, head of viticulture at Adega Mayor, is certain of.



"Plants are living beings, so they learn. I believe that the vines here are adapting – they are becoming more resilient than they were five years ago."

Francisco Pessoa, Viticulture Manager, Adega Mayor



[video](#)



Iain at Mouchão said, “Before global warming comes global weirding; we’ve certainly had that hit us here. We’ve had three 100yr events in thirteen months. When it comes to heat, it is the duration of the heatwaves that hit us most. 2018 was a case in point where we had 4-5 days at ~45°C.”

Iain’s observation of non-irrigated vines performing better was an outlier as many other estates use drip-irrigation during the hot months to guarantee production. As temperatures continue to rise, it will be interesting to see how the best approach to vine resilience develops.

Herdade do Rocimis an estate that Bruno Gomes describes as having ‘experimentation in our DNA’. Rocim’s use of Talha winemaking embody the regional culture and have received international recognition.

Here there is a strong focus on indigenous grape varieties that, along with olive groves, sprawl over the curvaceous landscape reaching an altitude of 200m. This elevation combines with an Atlantic wind pattern to produce large diurnal temperature variations (differences between day and night). This welcome cooling characteristic benefits the plants, in this otherwise hot and arid climate.

It is early June and Bruno takes us on tour of the vines. One vineyard plot of the Aragonez grape variety (Tempranillo in Spanish) stands out. These vines had been pruned the day before and stand before us stripped naked in the overcast early summer day. This late pruning is an experiment to see if a later cooler harvest in October can be achieved. The objective here is to preserve acidity, creating a fresher style with lower alcohol content.

"We have some old vineyards which we irrigated too much and too often with small quantities of water each time and these suffered quite badly in the heatwave. The ones that had no irrigation at all were untouched. That was a big lesson for us."

Iain Reynolds Richardson, CEO, Herdade do Mouchão



With an increasing focus on alcohol in wine, it is no surprise that winemakers in Alentejo are experimenting with ways to produce lower alcohol wines. Herdade Dos Lagos, Adega Mayor and Rocim are all involved in this quest, seeking lower alcohol levels to meet market expectations.

Alentejo has had a reputation for producing robust structured wines. Today, native grape varieties are also making a big come back. Portugal is famous for having hundreds of indigenous varieties and it is not uncommon to see these mixed up as 'field blends', as we saw at Herdade dos Grous.

At Casa Relvas, Malhadinha Nova, Fita Preta and Mouchão we focussed a lot of our time in tasting varieties that were new to me. Helena Ferreira from Adega de Borba voiced concern that obscure native varieties are hard to convince drinkers to buy.

These varieties, when crafted with such meticulous care, reveal distinct identities that speak authentically of Alentejo. For wine enthusiasts, discovering these expressions offers a compelling journey into unexpected territory. That the region produces wines of such refinement and complexity—despite increasingly challenging climate conditions—both defies expectations and points to the triumph of expertise over adversity.



[video](#)



“Our challenge, everywhere in Alentejo is producing wines with lower alcohol content. It’s here ...it’s the sun and sun produces sugar in the grapes and sugar turns into alcohol. That’s why it is so important for us to have shadow. Shadow nets, shadow curtains ...We don’t cut anything, we leave the plants because we want to create shadow.”

Helena Manuel, Head of Viticulture, Herdade dos Lagos



With the water from Alqueva and reliable weather, new larger production brands are appearing in Alentejo, like Herdade da Candeeira. Speaking with CEO Nuno Morais, he presents the project as a new-take on the region. He is working with grape varieties like Encruzado that typically are seen in the Dão region, now thriving in Alentejo.

Nuno's assertion that Herdade da Candeeira will have to increase production to reach a level of economic sustainability, highlights the tension between the economic and environmental pillars of sustainability that underlie the complex challenges society faces and the long-term security of the communities that compose the third pillar of sustainability.

“The main objective is to bring a different approach of Alentejo - a new view of what is our Alentejo. A fresh set of wines than what people are used to.”

The big challenge for producers is to find the boundary between what the land can sustainably give and what the business needs to survive. Nuno also acknowledged this.



“In this region you typically get 400mm of rain per year. 10yrs ago it was 800mm. Our main effort is to be more efficient with water. We don't allow the plants to produce everything they want. We don't allow ourselves to produce everything we want. We need to produce what we can. That is the way nature is regulating us.”

Nuno Morais, CEO, Herdade da Candeeira



[video](#)

During our visit to Herdade das Servas, I spoke with head winemaker and viticulturist, Renato Neves. Servas, like other estates in the programme, has been regenerating its land in an effort to restore the living vitality of the soils, particularly through increasing soil organic carbon. Renato is clear that while they are proceeding carefully, they are working to accelerate natural soil-building processes that would typically take decades or centuries in a stable climate.

Renato's appraisal of their efforts appeared to prioritise the environmental pillar of sustainability, centred on Professor Johan Rockström's concept of a 'safe operating space for humanity'—which he warns is diminishing. This operating space represents the critical threshold before systems break down and key support systems, including agriculture, are no longer viable. The scientific dimension adds urgency to the imperative of regenerating land and stimulating soil health and biodiversity, as these efforts contribute to expanding the safe and viable operating space for us all.



“All the climate science says that agriculture in this climate should focus on better products and not mass-production products because in a few years it will not be possible to make them without irrigation and in 50-70 years it may be impossible to make them at all. So following that route of mass-production is nonsense because it will end some day.”

Renato Neves, Head of Viticulture, Herdade das Servas

Renato served us a white wine whose production exemplifies Portuguese winemaking tradition. Made from Arinto, one of Portugal's most exciting native grape varieties, particularly well-suited to Alentejo's hot climate. Arinto retains its natural acidity even in warm conditions, making it increasingly valuable as temperatures rise. This wine comes from 34-year-old vines that not only contribute attractive complexity and mineral character to the wine, but also have established deep root systems providing natural resilience against climate extremes.

The wine's full golden colour and textural roundness, developed through lees stirring, is beautifully balanced by its cool, dry profile—achieved by blocking malolactic conversion. At 11.5% alcohol, it represents a growing movement toward elegant, lower-alcohol wines that don't compromise on flavour or complexity. Here is a wine that honours Portuguese viticultural heritage while embracing modern winemaking techniques and evolving consumer preferences.







EXTENDING THE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK

As I mentioned at the outset, Alentejo is a microcosm in the great scheme of the viticultural world. In October 2024 the inaugural Sustainability In Drinks (SID) conference was launched in London. Although I was personally impressed that WASP was one of the few founding partners of SID, it also struck me as a natural next-step in finding new ways to extend the reach of knowledge sharing, crossing regional boundaries.

SID attracted a rich wealth of talent from across the world of drinks (not just wine) who have been making great strides in sustainability, reducing emissions, developing regenerative strategies, enhancing biodiversity, communicating and so on.



From left: WASP Director, João Barroso, Judith Batchelar OBE and Jancis Robinson MW OBE.

Everyone acknowledged the scale of the challenges that are being faced. It was heartening to see that large drinks retailers were assimilating these issues into their buying patterns. With transport and packaging being the main source of greenhouse gas emissions for the drinks industry, it was also great to see discussions advancing, new research, such as the Porto Protocol's guide to packaging, 'Unpacked' being previewed.

Among the tasting tables, producers had a chance to speak with other exhibitors and visitors. Writers and other media influencers were able to learn from others while sharing their own knowledge and experiences.

SID proved to be a successful addition to the annual cycle of conferences where a range of expertises come together to help shape our collective future.

In news websites across the world in recent years, barely a week goes by without an article asking whether famous wine producing regions will survive the forecast impacts of climate change. If we lose wine then it is hard to see how food supply for the global population will be uninterrupted. That is the underscoring parallel that gives the work profiled in this case-study context.

Articulating the incredible work being done by producers, the collaborations and innovations, is all part of the contemporary story of wine. The energy and will to succeed that emanated from the Alentejo trip and was reinforced at SID, reminded me of an interview I recorded at the Royal Society in London with Professor Hans Schellnhuber, who founded the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) in Germany. Hans answered my question of how we accelerate our social and scientific response to climate change in a fragmenting socio-political world by stressing the importance of self-organising. When challenges rise up before us that are existential in any number of ways, be it culturally, politically, socially or climatically, we have to operate in coalitions of the willing to get to the places we need to get to.

Despite so many challenges today and so many reasons to despair, there are just as many reasons to keep pushing, to keep learning and keep striving for the best outcomes for our communities and for the wild web of nature that sustains us. So, it is with gratitude and for the efforts of the WASP team and the producers who are certified and certifying, that I raise the next glass to.

Saúde!

