



Sir Cliff's Algarve wines

When one British family teamed up with Sir Cliff Richard to make wines in the Algarve, the combination proved to be a winning formula.

WORDS Daisy Sampson

Now, more than 10 years on, the *Adega do Cantor*, translated as 'winery of the singer', is a well-established producer in the region and welcomes thousands of visitors each year to the winery near Guia (Albufeira council).

Take a drive through the winding roads of nearby Vale de Parra (Valley of the Vine Leaf) and you will see acres of neatly planted vines in this picturesque part of the Algarve.

However, if you want a closer look at a working winery, then a call into the *Adega do Cantor*

winery (pictured above) will let you experience the true agricultural Algarve and the sumptuous wines that come from the rich soils of this region.

It was in 1997 that Sir Cliff Richard decided to plant grapes at his *Quinta do Moinho* farm.

"I had just planted a field of fig trees at the farm but Australian wine maker David Baverstock asked me whether I would prefer a glass of wine or a dose of fig syrup. There was, of course, no contest!" Sir Cliff Richard told *Algarve Welcome Magazine*.

By 2000, Sir Cliff was able to pick the first of the grapes from

his farm and it was at this point that he called in the help of long-term Algarve resident Nigel Birch, who later became his business partner. Before long, the Birch family was involved in the *Adega do Cantor*.

Nigel had uprooted his avocados in the neighbouring farm to Sir Cliff and replaced these with grapes while his son Max changed careers and learnt all about the wine trade from David Baverstock, honing his skills in wine making.

Nigel's daughter Rebecca explained how the *Adega do Cantor* is much more than just the

famous face behind the wine and how the ethos of the winery encompasses the organic processes used, which help to keep this small family run business producing top quality wines.

"We are not a large producer. We are a boutique winery, which uses lots of personal care to ensure the high quality of our product," she said. "At the *Adega do Cantor*, we concentrate on producing a small amount of top quality wine using organic methods and all the vines are all tended to by hand."

With a large number of new producers now operating in the

region, the wine industry in the Algarve has grown as has the *Adega do Cantor*.

"When we first began, there were only three wine producers in the region and now there are 19. In the last 10 years, we have seen the region going back to its roots as farmers return to the fields to grow grapes as an alternative way to make money that is not entirely tourism related," said Rebecca Birch.

"The reputation of Algarve wines has improved massively. It used to be seen as a poor area for wine production but lots of new small wineries such as ours have come onto the market and helped to raise the standard of Algarve wines. This helps the region as a whole, showing people that there is so much more to the Algarve than beaches and golf courses, and providing tourists with alternative trips while they are here on holiday."

The wines produced at the *Adega do Cantor* reflect the demands of the market, which has seen a shift in the perception of both rosé and white wines in recent years.

"When we first began

the winery, everyone was drinking red wine, so both Sir Cliff's and Nigel's farms were planted with red grapes. However, fashions have changed and now white wine is often the preferred choice and, to accommodate this demand, Max's farm is planted with white grapes," said Rebecca Birch.

"It is also interesting to see how rosé wine has gone from being a very unfashionable tippie to being one of the most popular wine choices. Gone are the days when rosé wine was pale and fizzy. Now a rosé such as ours is a lot darker, full of flavour and very fruity."

The perception of wine itself has also changed and as the *Adega* has grown, so have the numbers of people wishing to visit the quaint winery.

"It used to be that wine was considered to be a drink for the posh and rich, but people now realise that this is something everyone can enjoy and the number of guests on our tours reflect this," she said.

"More than 80 per cent of those who visit the winery have little to no knowledge about wine and this shows the changing demography

of wine drinkers."

While the staff at the *Adega* is keen to show guests the process involved in the making of wine, from picking the grapes from the vines to the barrel storage in the cellars, they also encourage visitors to learn how to taste wine.

"We want people to go away from the tour having learnt about wines in general and how to taste them, know if they are corked or not, and so on," said Rebecca Birch.

When leaving the winery, take the time to explore the Vale de Parra area. There are plenty of local restaurants and cafés for all budgets, all providing various local dishes on the road that leads to the spectacular beach at Galé.

And if you travel a little further to the west, there is ample opportunity to view birdlife at the Salgados lagoon, a natural beauty spot of the Algarve.

For further information about the daily tours at the *Adega do Cantor*, please call 968 776 971 or alternatively visit www.winesvidanova.com (available in English).

