



© Inês d'Orey



HERDADE
ALDEIA DE CIMA

Press release · March 2020

IN 7 SIMPLE STEPS, WE WILL EXPLAIN THE HISTORY OF THE WINES FROM A SMALL VILLAGE IN THE SERRA DO MENDRO THAT HAS ONE OF THE ALENTEJO'S FIRST TRADITIONAL TERRACED VINEYARDS: THE HERDADE ALDEIA DE CIMA

STEP 1 – ANTICIPATION OF A DREAM

Every plot of land is unique In the 2400 hectares of the Herdade Aldeia de Cima, located in the municipality of Vidigueira. People have been attracted to, and settled in this area, since time immemorial, due to its specific characteristics and authenticity. Next to the old Roman road between Évora and Beja, in a schist plateau bathed by a gentle breeze, 330 metres above sea level, the small village of Sant 'Anna da Serra do Mendro was built in 1758.

It was also here, in the highest point of the Serra do Mendro - that separates the Alto Alentejo from the Baixo Alentejo, at 424 metres above sea level, - that the Alentejo's first traditional terraced vineyard was planted, in January 2017, enabling the village's community spirit to be reborn. The project was conceived by the couple, Luisa Amorim and Francisco Rêgo, who live in the estate with their two daughters.





© Inés d'Orey

© Rodrigo Cardoso

Luisa Amorim was already very familiar with these lands, that were owned by her father, Américo Amorim. She created a close relationship with the Alentejo region from an early age. Along with cork, which is central to her family universe, wine has become one of her great passions over the last 20 years and she also manages the Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo estate, in the Douro, and more recently the Taboadella estate, in the Dão region.

She remembered the freshness and texture of the wines that characterised the Alentejo in the 1980s, prior to the invasion of international grape varieties. Following the death of her father she decided to anticipate her dream. In May 2017, almost prematurely, she contacted her winemaker from the Douro - Jorge Alves - and asked him to experiment with a wine that would have a strong typical Alentejan style, textured and fresh, using Portuguese grape varieties or those adapted to the terroir.

STEP 2 – THE POTENTIAL OF A DORMANT ALENTEJO

It was precisely in the highest point in the Serra do Mendro, that Luisa Amorim sensed a “dormant” potential, which inspired this project. The estate occupies a unique geological heritage, 424 metres above sea level, with slopes of 25° to 40°, from where it is possible to see the vast horizon and admire the immensity of the Alentejo’s plains, olive groves and vineyards, vegetable gardens, corn fields and small towns and villages of Vidigueira and in the distance the city of Beja. She saw this as the perfect place for a vineyard using traditional terraces, like those found in the Douro.

This is a different Alentejo - the Serra do Mendro - part of the oldest geomorphological zone of the Iberian Peninsula. It has a unique geological structure known as a horst, that resulted from a raised block of the Earth's crust, where thousands of metres of silt have been accumulated. The lands that exist today, consisting of schist, granite, gabbros, quartzite and limestone, among many other types of substrate rocks, offer an original portion of the Ancient Iberian Massif *. These rocks underpin the poor skeletal soils, which once served red mud farms found throughout the Alentejo region.

The Alentejo is renowned for its plains, in a landscape that stretches as far as the eye can see, where today its wheat fields primarily serve as endless walls for intensive olive groves. But the locals, also know that the Baixo Alentejo region includes many mountainous zones – 6 in total, from north to south:

- Serra de Grândola (383 metres above sea level);
- Serra de Portel (418 metres above sea level);
- Serra do Mendro (424 metres above sea level);
- Serra da Adiça (522 metres above sea level);
- Serra do Cercal (378 metres above sea level).

Located in the southwest corner of the Iberian peninsula, the Alentejo is the lowest section of what remains of an old mountain chain, which some specialists call Hercynica and others Varisca, which began to rise from the ocean bed about 380 million years ago. The maritime soils, which made up the supercontinent of Pangeia, left fossils in the schist subsoils that indicate the former environment and age, via the various rock layers that were initially horizontal and are now folded, creased, fractured and displaced. Over time the rocks were crushed by erosion, that swept thousands of metres of land above them, and thereby concealed them reducing this great mountain range to the surface of the plateau. The landscape of the Alentejo, which some geographers and



geologists have called a peneplain, does not correspond to the standard concept of a “plain”. On the contrary, given that it is an elevated surface in relation to the sea level, scholars have called it a plateau or highland, as is the case of the entire Meseta Ibérica (Iberian Plateau), encompassing all the southwestern zone of the Iberian peninsula, including the Alentejo. For this reason, in geological terms, the “plain” of the Alentejo is not being perfected at present, and is instead undergoing a process of degradation.

STEP 3 – THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE VINES

The Alentejo is a region with few natural resources. But it is the only wine region that has almost all types of soils found in Portugal. With a unique biodiversity, the highlands of the Serra do Mendro and the Herdade Aldeia de Cima have a huge extension of cork oak trees and holm oak trees and soils typically used in the Mediterranean, which are apparently poor, but are rich in schist and have enormous diversity.

The highlands of the Vidigueira region offer an excellent microclimate and truly outstanding soils for cultivation of vineyards. They also have higher average annual rainfall than the neighbouring zones as well as milder temperatures due to the proximity to the Alqueva dam, Europe’s largest artificial lake. Indeed, the Serra do Mendro has a unique ecosystem, with a natural and cultural heritage with immense biodiversity, untouched by industrial and urban pollution, where the schist soils maintain humidity during the day and heat during the night, resulting in greater balance and, potentially, greater minerality to the wine, as in the Douro region. A team of geologists studied the



geological heritage of the Herdade Aldeia de Cima and, between the mountains and the plateau, they defined four distinct zones, which made it possible to explore the diversity of the soils, the different solar exposures and unexpected thermal amplitudes. This made it possible to create 36 natural micro-terroirs in a total of 20 hectares, divided into four vineyards: the Vinha dos Alfaiates, in the Serra do Mendro and the Vinha da Família, Vinha de Sant'Anna and Vinha da Aldeia, in the plateau. The winemakers work with a complex and extraordinary diversity of indigenous grape varieties and other varieties perfectly adapted to the region - 65% red grape varieties and 35% white grape varieties. Viticulture began in integrated production, and will later be converted into organic production.

STEP 4 – THE TRADITION OF THE WINERY

Working as a family, Luisa Amorim and Francisco Rêgo are creating wines that preserve the history of the locale, presented to the market two years after the grape harvest, in a small production of around 100,000 bottles. This project seeks textures, soil minerality, antiquity and tradition. The Herdade Aldeia de Cima's classic and elegant wines preserve the typical character of the terroir and have enormous complexity, based on the heterogeneous soils and the indigenous and Portuguese grape varieties.

The winery was built in the impressive former cow shed, built in 1953, known as the Armazém das Ramadas. To restore the building, the couple talked with their friends and interior designers, Ana Anahory and Felipa Almeida, whose signature and good taste can easily be identified by the way that they work in connection with the Alentejo's culture and handicrafts.



The final result - beautiful, minimal and memorable – is perfectly combined with the building's architecture, formed by thick, whitewashed walls that support an original metallic structure with three wings, built around a spectacular pair of silos in the central courtyard.

Marked by the encounter between the past and future, the winery enables the wines to be made with minimal intervention, where the goal is to highlight the heterogeneity and different character of the micro plots, soils and grape varieties. It was considered to be essential to mature the wines in oak vats and Nico Velo cement tanks, and design a winery with a capacity for 100,000 bottles. Ancestry and tradition were sought in the ageing room, where wines are aged in small terracotta bowls, each of which is unique, and in amphorae, made using ceramic powder on a natural fibre structure called cocchiopesto. From the outset it was clear that the barrels had to be 500 litres, with an average volume effect that would respect the origin and characteristics of the Vidigueira grapes, given that the tannins in this territory are more polymerised and have a silky texture and, for this reason, the wines do not need the high concentrations generated by smaller-volume barrels.

This same respect for the culture of the local village is reflected in the brand image developed by the designer Eduardo Aires. Whatever the path chosen it was essential to transmit the spirit of the Alentejo. During their first meeting, while Luisa was speaking, Eduardo sketched a few lines on a sheet of white paper that corresponded to the façade of a whitewashed house, in the small, dilapidated village, tracing the outline of the door that invites us to experience life in the Aldeia de Cima.



Design by Eduardo Aires

Together they started from scratch and focused on the essential - the meaning of the territory that, since 1758, has explored a historical legacy marked by five centuries of Arab culture. In turn, the colours they chose – found throughout the estate and in various details in the interiors – were the green leaf of the cork oak tree and the terracotta red of the clay soil that saw it grow, complemented by the effect of the whitewashed walls, used in the paper of each wine label.

Tailored to demanding contemporary consumers, the goal was to create a strong but serious image. The result is plain to see, and in 2020 has been recognised by the European Design Awards, where Herdade Aldeia de Cima won the gold award in the “alcoholic beverages packaging” category. This is the first time that a range of Portuguese wines has been ranked amongst the best in Europe in one of the world’s most prestigious design awards.

STEP 5 – THE WINES AND THE LOCAL CULTURE

Everything started well and quickly, and in just a year and a half, Herdade Aldeia de Cima and the land that hitherto belonged to Dom João de Aboim, the seigneur of Portel, and which later passed into the hands of the Portuguese royal family, has begun to reveal a truly unique quality – nuances hidden in small terroirs that had actually existed for millions of years.

It was decided that the range would include four wines - two iconic wines: Alyantiju Tinto and Alyantiju Branco and two reserve wines: Herdade Aldeia de Cima Tinto and Herdade Aldeia de



Cima Branco. In the future, it is planned to produce different lots, that will highlight the character of the Serra do Mendro and its plateaus, interlinked soils that bring to mind complex wines, and that transport a minerality of trace elements from the deepest layers of the soil to our senses.

This genuineness and purity combined with traditional grape varieties leads us to a deeper, denser and smoother Alentejo, with more remote origins – in which we can hear the echoes of the voices of Phoenicians, Visigoths, Romans and, above all, the Arabs, who arrived in the 8th century and dominated the region for 500 years, and still influence the Alentejo's culture today. Some scholars describe the Alentejo as someone with the spirit of a Roman in the body of an Arab. The locals pronounced the name of their land: Alyantiju or **وخيتن يلا**.

ALYANTIJU BRANCO (WHITE)

This is an experimental wine. Thinking about the Antão Vaz grape variety, harvested at precisely the right moment, after waiting for the aromatic and phenolic maturation, and fermented in 500-litre French oak barrels, takes us to another level of winemaking. Here we can see the Alentejo reflected in the minerality and sweet and spicy aromas of the flowers of the fields and the brilliant sunshine. Further ahead we encounter gravity, freshness, tension and linearity of a long and precise finish. Finally, we realise that the entire Alentejo can fit inside a small bottle.

ALYANTIJU TINTO (RED)

We interpret our origins. Here the intensity and genuineness transport us to a unique Alentejo, immersed in density, fragrance and depth. The indispensable reference is the history, culture and tradition of the Alentejo region. A serious wine that is true to its soil, a unique combination of robust origins, sophistication and precise solidity. A timeless wine with a strong and lasting personality.



RESERVA BRANCO (WHITE)

Produced in the orographic accident constituted by the Serra do Mendro, which separates the Alto Alentejo and Baixo Alentejo. This geological fault in Vidigueira, with an east-west orientation, forms a natural corridor ideal for the influence of Atlantic winds. It was here, looking up at the light blue sky, that the owners dreamt of making the Herdade Aldeia de Cima's wines. The Reserva Branco (white) combines the terroir of this land, influenced by the cooler climate and the diversity of skeletal soils, producing a balanced wine with a fragrant aroma, linear structure, and high density and minerality.

RESERVA TINTO (RED)

Having studied the history of the Alentejo's wines and vineyards - a continuous presence in time and in the space of tradition, geology, textures and aromas, the Herdade Aldeia de Cima preserves genuineness because the owners felt, from the outset, that they had time on our side. They looked for traditional grape varieties and found them, because they were close at hand. It by using the simplest processes that transparent wines can be produced, filled with emotion and reflecting the terroir, authentic messengers. The goal was to convey an understanding of the nature of the local settings and this has been achieved.

STEP 6 – THE TEAM

The Herdade Aldeia de Cima project is managed by the couple, Luisa Amorim and Francisco Rêgo and has been coordinated from the outset by José Falé who has vast experience of management of estates, especially in the Baixo Alentejo. Gonçalo Ramos is the head of forestry activities and animal production and the winemakers are Jorge Alves and António Cavalheiro with viticulture support from Joaquim Faia. Together they constitute an excellent team.



STEP 7 – COMMUNITY LIVING IN THE VILLAGE

In the Herdade Aldeia de Cima, sustainability means profound respect for the land. Focusing on the recovery of an entire territory, this is not just a question of reducing the use of chemicals, but of recovering the Serra do Mendro's unique ecosystem, helping preserve this natural and cultural heritage, and reinforcing biodiversity for future generations and the well-being of all those who live and work there.

Working for nature, and not against it, is the daily motto of Luisa and Francisco, who view the Herdade Aldeia de Cima as a lifetime project, experiencing the authenticity of this place and the community spirit of the village located in the Iberian-Mediterranean ecological area of the Ossa-Morena zone.

In the Alentejo, most of the local people still depend on the forest and agriculture for their livelihood and the Serra do Mendro is no exception - the population depends on what the land gives them, and benefits from the cultivating the cork oak forest, integrated within one of the world's 35 most important biodiversity spots, on a par with natural paradises such as the Amazon, the African Savannah and Borneo.

The agricultural practices in the 2400-hectare estate require little intervention, and favour a production model integrated with nature, which aims to optimise the local natural resources, in accordance with landscape preservation and interactivity with existing ecosystems.





Using a sustainable agroforestry management system - which aims to generate profit over the medium to long term - the pastoral agro-silvo system of the cork oak forest, which is subject to anthropogenic interventions, is based on the combined presence of two different oak tree species - the cork oak (*quercus suber*) and holm oak (*quercus rotundifolia*). The forest provides a variety of food and wildlife habitats, and is essential for soil conservation, regulates the water cycle, decreases carbon emissions and conserves biodiversity.

Due to their isolation, the peoples of the Alentejo developed an autonomous and sustainable way of life, reflected in the rich gastronomy, which combines products from the pasture land - milk, cheese, meat, ingredients from the vegetable gardens and orchards, honey and forest fruits such as almonds, olive and arbutus. Today we use the same traditional techniques that combine the accumulated scientific knowledge about the ecophysiology of plant species and their interaction with native fauna.

In the forest formed by cork oak trees and holm oak trees, with some scattered wild pine, with stony schist soils, there are natural habitats such as woodlands filled with Cretan rockrose, woolly rock rose, gorse, grom, small trees and brambles, interspersed with spontaneous grassland. This habitat is ideal for sedentary species such as Iberian partridge, hare, pheasant, small bustard, fox, mon-goose, wild boar and Alentejan black pig. In these pollution-free lands, it is common to see storks, sparrows and goldfinches, as well as impressive birds of prey, such as the black vulture or kite. Even today, in the highest plateaus, white merino sheep are bred that graze throughout the year in the estate's large stretches of land, helping to maintain the soil, and avoiding the danger of forest fires.

The Herdade Aldeia de Cima's wines reflect these same practices in this immense ecological mosaic, with minimal winemaking intervention, currently in an integrated production mode but which in the future will be converted into organic production. Alongside the wines, the honey from Herdade Aldeia de Cima, which is pure and obtained without any human intervention, also deserves a special reference. The honey is based on the diversity of a typically Mediterranean wild flora, with rich pollen, in particular rosemary that grows spontaneously in the forest of the Serra do Mendro. With a unique biodiversity, the Herdade Aldeia de Cima has always had plentiful water, demonstrated by the existence of several water wheels. The small plots of land in the low-lying areas, which are more fertile, were dedicated to vegetable gardens and orchards of fig and pomegranate trees.

Here, we respect the past to build the future.



© Rodrigo Cardoso

Herdade Aldeia de Cima

www.aldeiadecima.com

For more information | O Apartamento

Armando Ribeiro - (+351) 918 366 206 - armandoribeiro@oapartamento.com

Catarina Palma - (+351) 967 834 787 - catarinapalma@oapartamento.com