



My winemaker experience (so far)

For my first column this year, rather than, as usual, reviewing a particular wine, I have decided to write about what has been, over this past year, my most interesting and enjoyable experience in the world of wine.

It has all taken place right here on my doorstep, around a 10-minute drive from my home in Carvoeiro, at the Quinta dos Vales winery near Estômbar.

Around springtime last year, I took the plunge and

invested in my own mini-vineyard as part of the estate's Winemaker Experience programme.

In a nutshell, I am one of some 17 private clients who have so far joined the programme, which entails

leasing a parcel of vineyard and, with the help of the resident winemaking team, creating and making my own wine.

In my case, this consists of 173 plants of the Alicante Bouschet variety, which will result in around 250 bottles of wine.

The story so far is that I decided to harvest early, right at the beginning of August, for I was aiming for a wine that would be relatively low in alcohol, which is quite unusual for Alicante Bouschet as it is usually used to make rich and full-bodied reds.

I, however, was aiming to produce a "Palhete", which is basically somewhere between a red and a rosé, where freshness is of the essence, so not only did we harvest early in the season but very early in the morning.

Clients do not actually have to harvest their own grapes but, looking for a fully immersive experience, I dragged some close friends and family members out of bed, and we met the Quinta dos Vales winemaker Marta Rosa at 5am to start picking and, by 7am, our grapes were already in the winery ready for selection and pressing.

The experience so far has made me realise, for someone who thought they knew a thing or two about wine, how



A first taste of delicious grape juice ahead of vinification

little I actually know about how it is made.

My first wine is now undergoing the final ageing process, after having sat on

the fine lees for four months with lots of bâtonnage (stirring) and should be ready for drinking by March or April.

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We arrived at the wine estate at 5am to pick our grapes before first light



Our grapes were all picked by 7am and arrived cool and fresh at the winery



Grapes were selected by hand before destemming and then pressing

