

Food and wine

Amid the lush greenery of his Portuguese vineyard, Sir Cliff Richard has surely done something amazing - in fact the photograph shows him exclaiming "Yes! I made all this happen".

Well, not quite. Whilst he pressed the first vintage with his feet in an old lagar (a traditional open trough for pressing the grapes by foot), "they had trouble getting me up out of the press, I was enjoying myself so much!"

The music veteran confesses he has little involvement in making his wine. "I feel most comfortable just looking at the grapes growing".

He is, however, deeply committed to this project, which he agrees is an "expensive hobby".

"I was slightly nervous about starting this project as the Algarve is not known for making good wine but now I call it my little miracle.

"When my friend David Baverstock (my winemaker and also winemaker at Esporao) asked me what sort of wine I would like to produce from my vineyard, I told him that I am very basic about wine.

"I like to drink a light wine at lunchtime, such as a rosé and red wines which are rich and warm on the palate on other occasions.

"So David suggested planting different international varieties such as Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon, and also indigenous varieties such as Aragones, to create a style which I like".

The resulting wines are Vida Nova red and a rosé, which is currently a whopping 14% alcohol. "We plan to reduce the alcohol level of the rosé to make it more of a light, luncheon or aperitif wine."

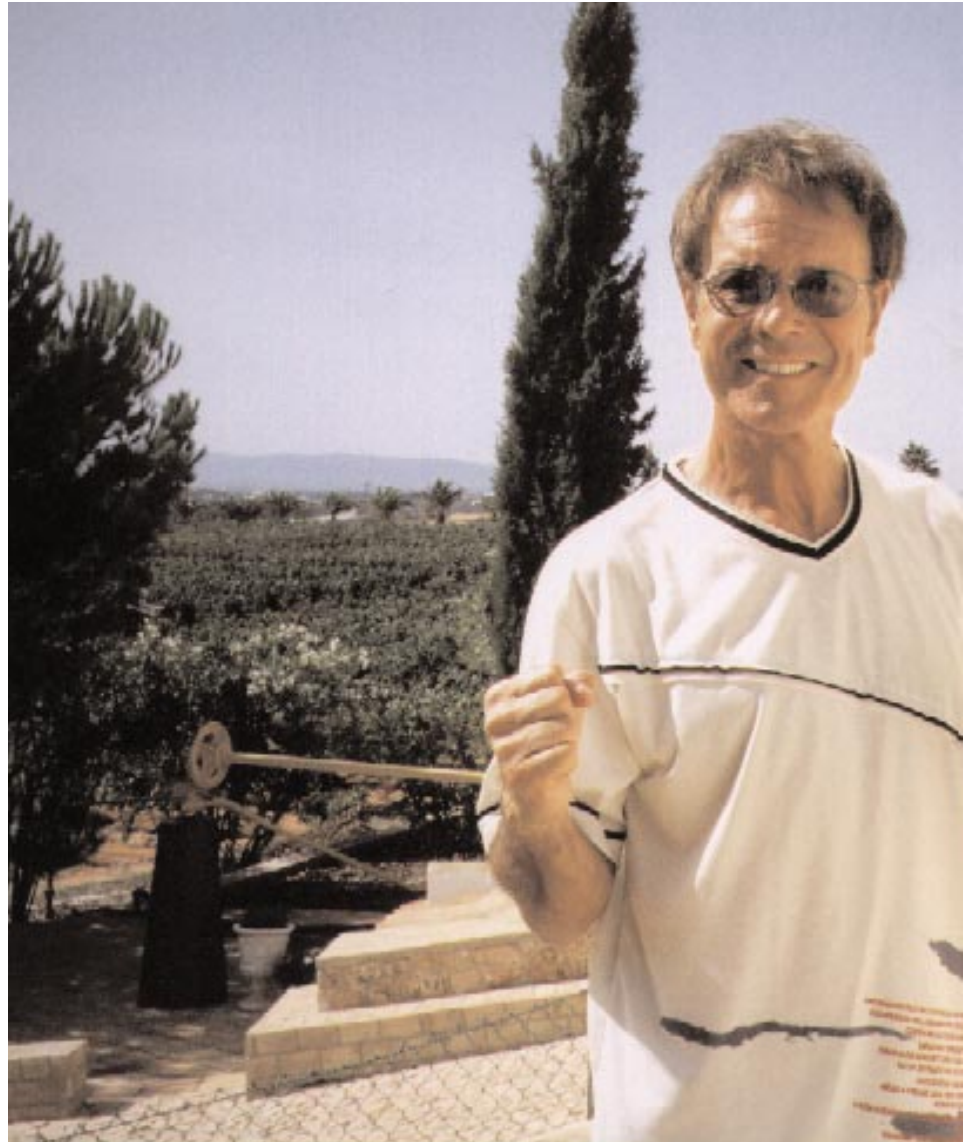
Personally I rather liked the big butch headiness of his rosé, although most of us would be under the table after a couple of glasses at lunchtime.

Sir Cliff finds that his fans have taken to his wine in a big way.

"What is amazing is the feedback from fans - they really love the wine, and so do the wine press. I have had better reviews for my wine than for my shows or records!"

When did he first try wine?

"My first recollection of wine was during the making of *Summer Holiday* in Greece, when we drank Liebfraumilch and Retsina", he says. And the



Vintage Cliff

SIR CLIFF
RICHARD
reveals his
passion for
wine to Debby
Collinson

interest/love affair with Portugal began when?

"I first came to the Algarve in 1961 - several of us bought houses, Bruce Welch, Frank Ifield and me. I sold my first house 1973 just before the revolution and then bought another one.

"Then, more recently, I decided I wanted to buy a farm and found this one. Now I have a street in Portugal named after me - Rua Sir Cliff Richard (Cantor), meaning Singer. It's the road where I had my first house".

"I am very fond of the Algarve - it is always holiday time for me".

Which makes him even more special for giving up his time the night before to sing for 500,000 people on the beach at Albufeira for the 500th anniversary of the charter of the town, followed by an opening of the winery the next night.



Cliff in his Portuguese vineyard – ‘Yes, I made it happen!’

Sir Cliff has done a lot for the Taverners too – he has appeared at the Palladium for The Lady Taverners, which raised over £75K. He also presented a minibus named after him to the White Lodge Children’s Centre in Surrey, which specialises in the assessment, therapeutic treatment and pre school education of children with cerebral palsy and like conditions.

He has also generously given wine for us to auction: he gave a case of his wine for auction when it was first produced; now he is to donate signed bottles of wine for auction by The Lady Taverners. He also played in a Lord’s Taverners tennis match at Queens.

Will he do more with the Lord’s and Ladies, I dared to ask? “If there is an opportunity”, he replied. ■

When 400 Lord’s Taverners, celebrities, guests and cricketers descend on Sark for their annual match, who has the headache of making sure they dine in style on this tiny island? Gary Thompson does

Shell shock

Preparing a seafood lunch in a marquee for 400 people may not seem too onerous a task for an experienced chef. But for Gary Thompson, head chef at the Aval du Creux Hotel in Sark in the Channel Islands, the operation is anything but straightforward.

For several years the Aval du Creux team have been responsible for the catering for the Lord’s Taverners versus Sark cricket match, which takes place every July. Taverners and guests from the UK and Guernsey, including stars of *EastEnders* and other celebrities, travel to the island to enjoy a day of sport, a fund-raising auction and, of course, a spectacular lunch.

The sea around Sark is rich with lobster so shellfish is the obvious menu choice. But even though the main ingredient is on the doorstep, everything else has to be imported from Guernsey. Sark, the smallest of the four main Channel Islands, is accessible only by boat but the weather can play havoc with cargo shipments even during the summer months.

There are no cars on the island, so even once goods arrive everything has to be transported to the hotel by tractor and trailer. It is prepared in the hotel’s kitchens, packed into a refrigerated

container (which has also been shipped in from Guernsey) and then towed by tractor to the sports field where the lunch tent is set up.

‘It sounds like a logistical nightmare and it can be nerve-wracking, but it’s all down to organisation,’ says Gary, a laid-back Irishman, who has spent most of his working life in Sark attracted by the challenge of the unpredictability that the island’s location can create.

Tickets for the popular event, which attracts more and more people each year, are sold almost up to the last week, so final numbers are not known until a few days before.

In the weeks leading up to it, local fisherman Dick Adams ensures that there are enough lobsters in his store pots.

Gary, meanwhile, with one eye on the increasing numbers, keeps in close contact with the shipping company and his suppliers in Guernsey.

The night before the cricket match it’s all hands on deck with staff working until the early hours.

But the next day, when the guests get their first glimpse of the marquee with the tables laid out in spectacular style, all the organisation is well worth it.

