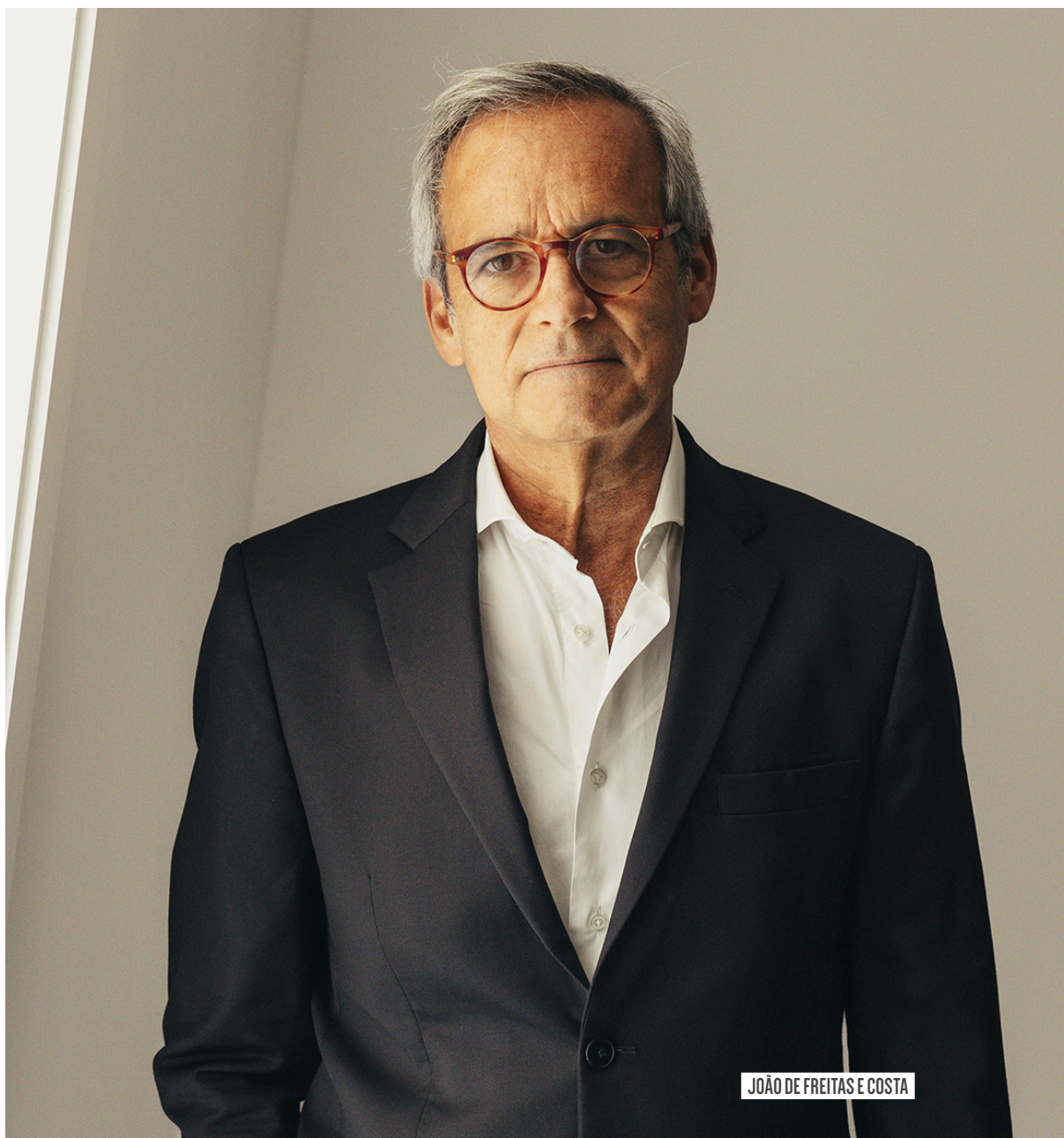




JOÃO DE FREITAS E COSTA

Pares, 15 years on its own terms

Founding partner João de Freitas e Costa discusses the trajectory of growth and the firm's strategy to remain independent

by glória paiva

Portuguese law firm Pares marks its 15th anniversary this year after a sustained growth trajectory, while remaining committed to one principle: keeping its own pace and independency. This was the reflection shared by founding partner and managing partner **João de Freitas e Costa** in a conversation with *Iberian Lawyer*, in which he discussed the firm's development. "Our objective is to maintain our brand, our culture and our DNA", he said.

From the 15 lawyers who made up the firm in 2011, Pares has grown to a 65-person team, including 15 partners, across Lisbon and the Algarve. The firm advises on areas including M&A, employment, tax and real estate, public law and litigation, including criminal and economic litigation. In 2025, its revenue was estimated at €6 million, representing 16% growth year-on-year, according to *Iberian Lawyer's* ranking of the 30 largest law firms in Portugal by revenue ([click to read](#)).

The firm has pursued its growth through a series of moves, including the most recent integration of Unit Legal in Lisbon ([click to read](#)). Previously operating as Espanha e Associados, Unit Legal brought in three partners — **Elsa Rodrigues**, **Rita Beirão** and **Luís Almeida Carneiro** — and 10 additional professionals into Pares, strengthening its corporate, tax and employment practices in September. Last May, Pares also announced a partnership with the Vilamoura office of **Susana de Queirós**, a boutique practice with more than 25 years of experience in the Algarve market ([click to read](#)).

In the Algarve, the partnership was designed to create a new platform for legal services covering corporate, M&A, tax, real estate, tourism and urban planning. The Vilamoura firm has experience advising foreign investment projects in the region across these areas. "It is a partnership that has worked very well; we work as if we were a single office", Freitas e Costa said.

POSITIVE ASSESSMENT

"Fifteen extraordinary years, despite the difficulties", is how founding partner João de

Freitas e Costa describes Pares' journey so far. Among the most challenging moments, Freitas e Costa, who has led the firm since its foundation, highlights its launch in 2011, against the backdrop of Portugal's economic crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the managing partner, the growth achieved so far has been driven both by an improvement in Portugal's socioeconomic environment and by a greater ability to develop business with existing clients. "We have sought to identify new needs within our own client base and create synergies between different practice areas", he explains. The firm is also monitoring growth opportunities through the integration of small teams and does not rule out further expansion in areas such as competition, technology and environmental law.

Leadership succession is another priority. With his term on the management board running until December 2027, the founding partner says Pares is already preparing the transition to a new generation. The aim is to progressively transfer not only the firm's leadership, but also client relationships, a greater role in decision-making and profit distribution to younger partners. "We have to make room for younger people and their ideas to grow", he says.

Around half of the firm's current partners belong to the millennial generation and, according to Freitas e Costa, they are the ones who are progressively taking on greater responsibility. "There is nothing worse in a law firm than an old storyteller", he says, arguing that the experience of the founders should not limit the rise of new generations.

ROOM FOR GROWTH

On the current state of Portugal's legal services market, the founding partner remains positive. He considers the market active and believes there is room for growth, despite uncertainty in the international environment. For him, there is a fundamental difference between working during a crisis and operating during a period of economic growth: "Working in a crisis means

dealing with bad work, redundancies, closing companies and insolvencies. Working during economic growth means being able to build positive things”.

Against a backdrop of increasing competition, including for talent, Pares is relying on a strong internal culture based on work-life balance, collaboration and a relatively flat structure. “Everyone gets stuck in and helps each other”, he says. According to Freitas e Costa, the team’s low turnover is one of the consequences of this model, which he regards as a competitive advantage. Measures include remote working, 25 days of annual leave, flexible working hours and no rigid monitoring of employees’ start and finish times. “People need to have friends, family and weekends”, he says.

Remote working and artificial intelligence are, in Freitas e Costa’s view, examples of unavoidable transformations to which the entire legal sector will have to adapt. Like other firms, Pares is implementing AI tools and, according to the managing partner, training and supervision are the most important aspects of this process. “Everyone is already using AI to optimise their time, so we need to make sure that people can use it consciously and wisely”, he says.

Pares in figures

15

years

65

lawyers

15

partners

€6 million*

*estimated revenue in 2025
according to *Iberian Lawyer*

For the coming years, therefore, the priority is to grow consistently without losing the firm’s identity. “If we can evolve, grow our revenue and grow our headcount while maintaining this”, he says, the firm will be on the right path. His personal ambition for Pares’ future can be summed up in preserving this model: “I would be very happy if the firm maintained this DNA”. 

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