

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report 2006 – Galicia on fire

The first two months of 2006 provided perfect conditions for pruning – clear, sunny days and cold, sometimes frosty nights. Pruning Albariño vines is a backbreaking chore at the best of times, working at full stretch, and is only made more unpleasant by winter rain beating down into your face (not to mention running up your sleeves).



Try to imagine doing this in pouring rain!

Of course cold, frosty nights in winter are always very welcome, not only keeping the sap down for pruning, but also helping to kill off some of the less welcome bugs in the vineyard.

March and the first half of April were wet, and supplemented to the much-needed rain that we had experienced during the final months of 2005. After two very dry winters this went some way to replenishing the depleted water table.

Easter brought a noticeable change, with the rain largely drying up – just a few lingering ‘spring showers’ on the odd day. The temperature also appeared to be on the increase, sometimes reaching the early 20’s (low 70’s F), but by no means as warm as Spring of 2004 and 2005.

May was **largely cool and changeable** - perhaps not the most perfect conditions, but most importantly dry and sunny in the period leading up to, and during the flowering. This varied weather pattern continued through June and July – lots of sun and many hot days, but then an occasional cooler day or two, with the odd rain shower. Actually not bad conditions for

grape cultivation, but then the humidity levels did oblige us (reluctantly) to spray against mildew on a few occasions during the summer..... actually quite normal considering the climatic conditions that prevail in our denomination.

During July we also did a lot of work in the vineyards, thinning the canopy where necessary, and creating a healthier environment for grape development. Not only directing more energy to the fruit, but also ensuring good light and better air circulation. The result of this work was that we actually used less treatment on the vines than any previous year, despite the slightly higher humidity.

August in Galicia will be remembered for one thing, and one thing alone..... forest fires. As you may have seen reported on your TV, or on our blogsite <http://castromartin.blogspot.com/> more than 80,000 hectares of land in the province of Pontevedra was consumed by fire (over a period of about 10 days).



August will be remembered for all the wrong reasons

Fortunately, the fires were restricted to mainly the forest and scrubland areas, and very few vineyards were lost to the flame. At Castro Martin the bodega was shrouded in smoke for four or five days, and some of our local roads were cut, but other than that we consider ourselves lucky to have escaped largely unscathed. After several days of smoke and fire, some much-needed rain arrived to damp down the smouldering countryside, and once again we were able to concentrate on the approaching harvest.

Early in September we started a much more detailed study of the vineyards, taking daily samples of our fruit, and making analysis of the juice. It very quickly became apparent that this was going to be an early harvest, perhaps up to 10 days earlier than the norm, so naturally we accelerated our preparations accordingly.



Picking begins in our Pazo vineyard

As grape sugar increased, and acidity slowly diminished the decision was made to start picking on Thursday 7th September, the earliest date in the history of the Bodega, and a full two weeks earlier than 2005. Strangely we found ourselves pretty much alone out in the vineyards of Salnés (the most northerly sub-zone of our denomination) as other Bodegas opted to wait. In previous years the sight of one person picking has been enough to start a cascade, but not in 2006.

The formidable Herminda, assisted by a group of around 35, headed our picking team, and within a couple of hours the first bunches started to arrive from our own 11 hectares. From the very start it was clear that the fruit was very, very healthy, and initial analysis revealed an acidity that would need little or no correction (no malolactic fermentation). But of course, this was just our first impression.

The second feature that quickly became apparent was the quantity – obviously we knew, simply by looking, that the yield looked good, but as the first couple of days progressed, we noticed that the kilos per hectare appeared to be up on the 2005 vintage..... we shall see.

As with every vintage our two main targets are simple, collect the grapes from the vineyards

without delay (preventing our 20kg baskets from sitting out in the sun), and then moving the grapes through the presses as quickly as possible. The secret for achieving this is not exactly rocket science; it is simply a question of having a disciplined and well-organised team, and this year, despite the increased kilos, we managed the turnaround of presses probably better than we have ever done before. Our two pneumatic presses were working almost without pause, and the minute one press finished it was immediately emptied and reloaded – working at an average of about 8.000kg every three hours.



Grape reception - working at full capacity on Saturday evening

Not only did we start the harvest according to the maturity of the grape, but in Galicia we also have to keep a close eye on the weather. We were very conscious that bad weather was closing in, and so we worked hard (especially over the weekend) to maintain our momentum. By Tuesday the biggest days were behind us, and not a moment too soon, before the first few showers started arrived in the area. Wednesday was a day for gathering up the last few precious kilos as the 2006 campaign came to a close.

This year you can find a detailed day-by-day account of our harvest by visiting our blogsite on www.castromartin.blogspot.com

Technical details of 2006 (all measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 245.814 kg
Potential alcohol: 12,52°
Total acidity: 8,12 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3,104

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