

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report 2008 – A 'typical' Albariño vintage

Here's a sentence which has surely never been penned in the entire history of the world and will probably never be written again – Between 1st September and 31st October 2007, southern Galicia had less rain than anywhere else in Spain. This was of course, in complete contrast to the same period last year when you may recall that we experienced nearly six months of rainfall in just 3 weeks. As I have said on previous occasions, so much for predicting the weather!

Yes, it's true; we had a very dry end to the year 2007, but then more than made up for it during the spring and summer of 2008. Indeed, at one point we feared for the whole vintage as the cool, wet weather persisted in the lead up to flowering at the end of May. As it transpired, flowering was just a shade later than in recent years, albeit that in some vineyards it was also a little uneven. Applying the old (but accurate) adage of 100 days from flowering to harvest, this would of course result in the 2008 campaign starting later than in the last few years.



An old vine enjoying some rare sunshine in our El Pazo vineyard

As the summer progressed so the changeable weather continued, alternating between days of rain and warm sunshine – not exceptionally hot, with temperatures only very rarely reaching as high as 30°C (86°F). It goes without saying that this type of weather is not ideal for grape cultivation, and we inevitably found ourselves spraying to prevent disease, as always, using the minimum amounts possible.

The month of July finally provided us with three weeks of hot sunshine, which quite memorably came to an end on the day of my birthday, when I mistakenly mentioned the word "barbeque". (Our readers based in the UK will appreciate how using this word is more effective than any red Indian rain dance). It was at this moment that the short period of predictable 'summer' weather came to an end.



The after-effects of an uneven flowering (these grapes are not used!)

The next month or two proved to be the most unsettled as we experienced days of sunshine interspersed by odd days of rain and showers. During the summer of '08 it would be quite rare to experience an entire week without some form of precipitation.

Whilst writing this I am always conscious of the amount of space that I allocate to weather in our vintage report (especially as the English are well known for their obsession with the subject), but suffice to say that it is probably the single most critical factor in determining the overall quality and character of each vintage.

The humidity levels in the build up to the harvest only added to our anxiety, and whilst grape samples gathered from different locations revealed respectable sugar levels, they also exhibited a little more acidity than we would like (even for an Albariño). Having grapes with high acidity is one thing, but picking them in good weather is an entirely different matter, and so, as the days wore on, we also started to scan for a decent 'window' for the real work to begin.

By the third week of September a seemingly settled period of weather developed, and so on a bright, sunny Friday morning we opted to start the 2008 campaign.

As the first grapes arrived around lunchtime, it soon became evident that all was well with the sanitary state of the fruit – there was no sign of any rot or disease (which could have occurred during a poor growing season). Initial signs were that we had a potential alcohol figure of around 12%, which is actually much nearer to the ‘norm’ for an Albariño than we have experienced during recent vintages. As mentioned earlier, the only slight imbalance was the acidity, but certainly nothing that a little malolactic fermentation would not take care of.

Picking continued apace over the first two days, and with a good forecast ahead we decided to rest on Sunday, giving the grapes a 24 hour reprieve and an opportunity to shed perhaps a fraction more acidity – normal service would be resumed at 9am sharp on Monday morning.



This year we tried to insure against problems by hiring a generator just in case of supply problems (sad's law - we did not need it!)

Indeed the gathering of grapes this year passed almost without incident, as our well-drilled team kept the flow moving swiftly between vineyard and bodega, and then on immediately to the presses. The only real hiccup was with the temperature control system, which after its last minute upgrade was working less than perfectly. The problem was not controlling the temperature, nor was it achieving the level of cooling that we needed, but it was merely that we had to ‘manipulate’ the controls and water pumps to get the cooling to exactly where we needed it. In a perverse way it was ‘lucky’ that 2008 was proving to be a reduced harvest, otherwise I believe that we would have struggled to keep the temperatures in check.

One of the other side effects of the cooling system upgrade was damage to the tanks that we either could not, or did not want to use. Harvest time is always a bit of a logistical

nightmare when it comes to organising the movement of wine around the cellar for racking etc., and being short of tank capacity in 2008 did not make life any easier.



Once cut open for inspection the extent of the damage was clear to see

Meanwhile, back at the harvest, after six days of frantic activity, we finally had all the grapes safely gathered in, untouched by one single drop of rain (a fact quite hard to believe in the context of our summer).

Despite the total kilos being even less than the already diminutive 2007 vintage, the quality was much better than we had dared hope for during the preceding months. First taste of the grape must revealed the intense, piercing sweetness that we have come to associate with Albariño grape, backed by a very zesty, citric acidity. Certainly some of the wine will be allowed to undergo malolactic fermentation, but there is no reason at all why we should not end up with a good quality, typical Albariño in 2008.

So, we now move on to the second stage, the equally demanding process of wine making.....

As always you can find a detailed day-by-day account of this year's harvest by visiting our blogsite on www.castromartin.blogspot.com

Technical details of 2008 (all measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 139.672 kg
Potential alcohol: 12,04°
Total acidity: 9,74 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3,05

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