

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report – 2013...just a little unlucky.

I had intended starting this year's report by claiming that we had endured a typical Galician winter, but to be honest there has been so much variation over the last ten years or so, it is has become quite difficult to actually define what "typical" really means. Certainly the 2012/13 winter in Galicia was cold and wet, which is pretty much what we would expect in this most northerly corner of Spain.

The first frosts of winter appeared at the end of November – a month or two earlier than in recent years. This was actually good news for us, as it is this first frost that signals the start of pruning. An early start simply gives us more time to complete the job.

December & January were both grey and miserable with plenty of rain and very little sun of any description - temperatures rarely reaching more than 10°C (50°F). The ground was well and truly saturated, and some lower lying vineyards (not ours) were actually under water for short periods.

February was not much better, but at least the sun did make a brief appearance on a few odd days, with at least one week of cold, clear weather at the month's close.

Perhaps one of the most significant features of winter 2012/13 was the temperature. Even on the brighter, sunny days thermometers did not move too much, registering only in the lower teens and rarely more than 15°C (59°F). In the middle of March we even witnessed a covering of snow on some Galician hillsides, and not a million miles from our own vineyards!

By flowering time things had barely improved at all and conditions were far from ideal. The result being that not only did we have a late flowering (towards the very end of May and well into the month of June), but it was also very protracted, and continued for weeks rather than days.

Towards the end of June we experienced a rather sudden and dramatic change, as not only did the sun finally emerge, but the thermometer also jumped into the high 30's (95-100°F). The

heat wave lasted for a couple of weeks, and, owing to the moisture in the soil, resulted in a significant growth surge in the vineyards. Once this impressive burst of heat subsided, the weather returned to a more regular pattern for a Galician summer (whatever that might be!). Daytime temperatures in the mid to upper 20's (75-85°F), with some cloud, interspersed with an odd shower of rain.

Little did we know at this point that yet another weather extreme was about to emerge. The month of August was completely dry, with almost no rainfall anywhere in Galicia. September followed in very much the same vein. A growing season that started as cool and wet, now ended with a period of virtual drought.

With only one week left before picking (and just at the moment that we didn't need it), the drought finally ended, and the heavens opened. The only positive from this was that the temperature also dropped significantly, and because our fruit was completely healthy, the risk of disease was slightly reduced.



Rain! Like a monsoon, a few days before picking

On Friday 4th October (exactly one year to the day that we finished the 2012 harvest), we opened our shutters to discover dry weather. Not sunny, in fact quite overcast, but after the recent rains we decided to go for it and make a start. The plan for the 2013 campaign was quite simple - to get everything collected as quickly as possible. Even more so this year because of the humidity (the longer we leave fruit on the vine the more chance there is of rot).

By midday the presses were loaded for the first time, and the silence was broken by the motors

of these two huge machines reverberating around the bodega. The noise from the presses serves as a permanent reminder for the days that follow.... the harvest is now in progress!

The kilos that we pick each day are carefully calculated - mainly from our own vineyards but supplemented by selected growers. The volume is worked out so that we do not overstress any part of the cellar at any one time. There is an optimum number of kilos that we have calculated to keep the presses ticking over, without overwhelming the grape reception. The objective is to avoid any backlog, as inevitably this will mean that grapes are not being pressed quickly – to be avoided at all costs.

Day one was, as always, a bit of a struggle as we try to get our brain cells into 'harvest mode'. In the end the work was all completed rather efficiently, as was day two – almost the perfect day. On day three proceedings become just a touch more complicated, not because of any failure in our systems, but simply because we start the next phase of work in the cellar – racking the grape must into clean tanks. Grape must is moved through the cellar on a rotational basis. The first step is pressing, it is then 'settled' in tank, and then once all the debris has subsided to the bottom, then the clean juice is drawn off into a clean tank to await fermentation. From this point on there is always juice being moved around the cellar.

It was not until day five that we encountered our 'annual technical problem'. This year the problem occurred in a very unexpected manner – our weighing scale decided to give completely meaningless readings!

In the grape reception we record the details of every single batch of grapes that arrive in our cellar – sanitary state, weight, sugar, pH and acidity. All the information is gathered on a computer located in the reception, which in turn is connected directly to an electronic scale. This scale weighs every case as they arrive. Of course without a scale we simply had no means of weighing the fruit, and this in turn, started to create a backlog. It might seem that recording exact kilos is not such an important issue, but we actually require very detailed information to give to the inspectors of our D.O. (Did I mention that we have official inspectors visiting at random for the entire duration of the harvest?)

Fortunately the scale repair was completed within hours, and the backlog was cleared without creating too many problems.

After our first overcast day, the rest of the 2013 campaign was completed under clear, sunny skies, and within 5½ days the job was complete. Our plan to collect fruit quickly had worked, and we gathered almost exactly the same amount of fruit as in 2006 but in one full day less!



Cases wait in the shade for collection in El Pazo

With all the fruit now safely gathered in our attentions now turn to converting it into a sensational wine.

In all honesty it is true to say that some degree of alcohol and perhaps a little concentration has been lost in the pre-harvest rains... but, with a little extra care and attention we are still convinced that we will be able to produce a wine worthy of our name. Angela tells me that the analysis of the must shows a very good balance, quite apart from the fact that it is fruity with a delicate floral element. As always, only time will tell.

You can find a detailed day-by-day account of this year's harvest by visiting our blog page on www.castromartin.com

Technical details of 2013 (all measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 221,437 kg
Potential alcohol: 11.77% alc/vol
Total acidity: 8.02 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3.09

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