

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report – 2014

With the exception of one dry, cold but sunny period between mid-November and mid-December, the winter of 2013/14 will go on record as being wet and stormy. Exceptionally cold polar air over North America meeting hot tropical air sent a stream of powerful storms spinning across the North Atlantic. Flooding and damage to property was widespread over large areas of north-western Europe.

From Christmas 2013 until the end of February 2014 the northwest corner of Spain experienced an unprecedented sequence of extreme weather conditions – days of torrential rain and storm force winds followed by perhaps a single dry day, and then yet more storms. There was simply no respite from this vicious cycle.

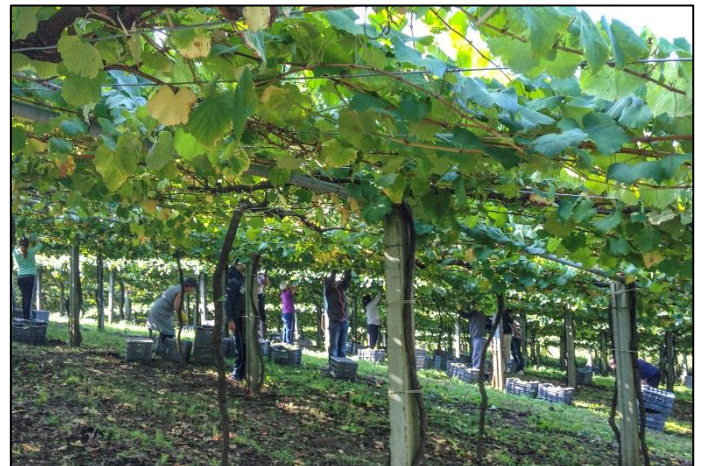
It was not until the beginning of March that we experienced our first short burst of dry weather – about ten days of pleasant sunshine, but with temperatures barely reaching 20°C (68°F). This was however, just enough to kick-start a bit of growth in the vineyards. Cooler, damp weather then returned, persisting throughout April and May with little respite between rainy days and the doggedly cool temperatures. By the end of May our thermometer had still barely topped the 20°C mark, unfortunately not the best conditions for flowering. A dramatic change came about 10 days into the month of June, where within the space of one week the temperature jumped by 10-12°C (20-22°F) – from just under 20° to around 30°C. As a result, the burst of vegetation in the vineyards was quite dramatic.

Unfortunately this burst of hot weather did not last, and we soon returned to the cycle of cool, wet, unsettled and hugely unpredictable weather that had become the ‘norm’ for 2014. July was overcast and damp, with moderate temperatures, below the average for the time of year. Of course, the major complication of the continued poor conditions was that we were obliged to treat our vineyards much more than we would have liked, but regrettably, in the circumstances, this was the only way to preserve our fruit and prevent the onset of disease.

August was marginally better, with many drier days, but still not as hot as we would expect. At this time of year the mercury would normally be pushing 30°C (86°F), whereas the average for 2014 was probably more in the 20°-25°C (68°-77°F) range.

Despite all these weather problems, our dedicated vineyard team had managed to cultivate some pretty healthy grapes, with a nice fleshy pulp and thick, viscose juice. After the first week of September everything was looking good, until the unthinkable happened – almost a carbon copy of 2013 – torrential rain!

After a few extremely wet days the torment subsided and from then on it simply became a question of holding our nerve – waiting for the optimum moment to pick (whilst praying that the weather would hold). On the 23rd September a minor miracle happened, almost overnight, the forecast changed completely, with fine sunny weather forecast for the next 7 days. Our window had suddenly opened before us!



Picking on Day 1 – the slopes of our ‘Bodega’ vineyard

On a bright, breezy Wednesday morning (24th Sept) we started the 2014 campaign. Our youngest vineyard, surrounding the bodega, was the first to be harvested - sample analysis had shown that these grapes were now in optimum condition. As it turned out our judgement was correct, and the first presses yielded a sweet, fragrant must, but with the acidity that we need to produce a typical Salnés albariño. As the first day continued the only real difference that we noted (when compared to our expectation), was the yield – fewer grapes per hectare than we had counted. This, however, is often no bad thing, as lower yield almost always equates to better quality.

Day two was quite unusual in that it never happened! After gathering the very best fruit on day one we decided to take a gamble by allowing our grapes to benefit from one more day in the hot sunshine (28°C/82°F). Although the sugar levels were good, the acidity was still a little high in some places. Whilst it takes some time for heat to influence the sugar levels, conversely, acidity can fall quite quickly, and thus an extra 24 hours could potentially make a noticeable difference. As it transpired, we were not wrong!

Friday morning was another bright and sunny day, and so, after a relatively easy first day (to ease ourselves into the routine), we called on a number of our grape suppliers to start collecting their fruit. Of course, we would also continue harvesting our own grapes, which meant that we probably had a busy day in store. At this point nearly all of the fruit collected was well balanced in analysis, just a few samples with a slightly elevated acidity, but not to any problematic level. The berries themselves were small (which is actually quite typical of our variety), but the most significant element was the thick, viscose juice – in almost complete contrast to 2013. Early indications showed that the alcohol level would be somewhere around the 12% mark.



Evening grape deliveries arriving at the bodega

Our second day of picking had passed off without incident, and so we braced ourselves for the Saturday onslaught. Saturday is, by tradition, by far the most popular day for our growers to pick their fruit, simply because they usually have all their friends and family available to help - 'cheap labour' I think it's called! So whilst our own grapes arrived in a timely fashion, many of the grapes from outside arrived in a more sudden cascade at the end of the afternoon. Thankfully our experienced

reception team soon had the job done, and potentially the trickiest day of the whole harvest was behind us.

As mentioned earlier, one of the significant features of this year's harvest would be the reduced quantity of fruit and grape must – for a variety of different reasons, but nearly all weather related. Vines that failed to flower, a few bunches that were lost to disease and smaller berries yielding less juice. I should add that the quality of our own grapes was exceptional, and owing to our rigorous vineyard management we had thankfully emerged largely unscathed.

With Saturday behind us, we had passed the mid-point, and on Sunday and Monday we continued to pick in fine weather conditions (better than we could have dreamt of only a week ago). During the latter half of the picking we gathered some of the very best grapes of the entire vintage. Of course this is probably down to the fact that much of this fruit was now coming from the oldest vines of our 'Pazo' vineyard.

And so, in summary, despite an indifferent summer and the heavy rain shortly before harvest, I think it would be true to say that we were more than satisfied with our 2014 crop. On the small side perhaps, but in terms of quality, certainly looking very promising.

As I put the finishing touches to this report, the fermentations are already under way, and it won't be too long before we know the true outcome of our labours – the proof, as they say, will be in our first tastings of the resultant wine in a few weeks' time.

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 2014 (all measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 132,087 kg
Potential alcohol: 11.88 % alc/vol
Total acidity: 9,64 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3,01

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