

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report – 2015 Defined by a storm

2015 might eventually be remembered as the vintage that was defined by a storm, perhaps creating two distinct qualities; those who picked before the storm, and those who picked after – only time will tell.

After a very difficult harvest period in 2014, with very wet weather just before picking, the winter of 2014/2015 continued in a very unpredictable manner. At the end of October there was a brief burst of hot, sunny weather with the thermometer almost touching 30°C (86°F). Within a week or so, at the start of November, the more typical Galician winter weather kicked in – wet and cold - but a very penetrating, damp cold. Altogether quite miserable.

This cold, wet weather continued until Christmas, when the temperature dropped even further! The difference being that it was under blue, crystal clear skies. Two weeks of sun and frosty weather lasted throughout the holiday period and into the New Year, when the winter rains that we normally associate with Galicia, eventually returned.



The first, very healthy grapes of 2015

In March we saw a welcome change, and the first signs of spring. During the early part of the month we witnessed some warm sunshine, with the thermometer touching 20°C (68°F). The month continued with mostly fine weather, an average daytime temperature of around 15/16°C (59-61°F), and just a few showers.

After this short burst of warm weather April reverted back to the more usual pattern of cool, damp days, and it wasn't until mid-May that we witnessed a significant improvement. Much drier, sunnier and significantly warmer weather arrived, and continued thankfully, throughout the flowering period.

June was largely warm and sunny, and apart from perhaps one brief shower, remained completely dry. July started with a few overcast days and showers, but with barely enough moisture to penetrate the canopy – average temperatures for the month were quite high, ranging between 25°C – 30°C (high 70's to mid 80's). The month ended with a few cooler overcast days, but still almost nothing in the way of rainfall. At this point our fruit was extremely healthy but also very abundant, and so during the month of July, we not only continued our usual work of thinning the canopy, but also removed a few bunches to make a 'green harvest' in our vineyards.

The clear bright weather continued for the first two weeks of August, albeit the average temperature appeared to drop by 3°C or 4°C. More significantly it remained almost completely dry. The second half of the month provided us with some much needed rainfall, not enough to prove catastrophic, but certainly enough to give our vineyards the watering that they so desperately needed. By early September the sun had returned – not a baking hot sun, but more in the low 20's C (68-77°F).

With samples collected from the vineyards, it became apparent that our 2015 harvest was imminent, and so, as always, our attention turned to the weather – to find a window of at least one warm, dry week in which to gather our fruit. In the short term this was not going to be easy, as the forecast predicted a changeable period (which in Galicia could mean anything). The even worse news was that the mid-term weather charts indicated the possibility of a big storm, blowing in across the Atlantic, arriving in less than a week. So, what to do for the best?

On Thursday 10th September, a rather cool, overcast day, we decided to start, and within a couple of hours the first grapes were already in the presses, and we eagerly awaited our first taste of the grape must. It was almost everything we had hoped it would be – as

always, the typical piercing fruits of albariño, with floral touches and a fresh, balancing acidity. Overall, a very good first impression.

The weather soon cleared up, and the grapes were flowing nicely, from vineyard, to reception (for weighing and analysis), and straight into the presses. With bad weather just over the horizon we made a decision to take as many kilos as we thought we could comfortably handle, but with a well drilled and highly organised team, there were no hold-ups at any point in the day.

It transpired, after the final count, that our first day had been the biggest for many a year, but little did we know what was to come. The second day started bright and sunny, and again the fruit started to appear in a timely fashion – however, it did not stop coming, and coming, and coming. By early evening the reception was almost saturated, filled to capacity, and we had to make a few of our suppliers wait for a short time before they could unload. However, after only an hour, order was fully restored, and our bodega team, and the presses, worked all night to clear the backlog. Our count the following morning revealed that the quantity picked on day two had surpassed the first day by some 20%! A new daily record had been created.

On day three, a partly cloudy, but dry day, we moved a little closer to home. Having completed Castrelo, Cunchidos and the best parcels of our Pazo vineyard during the first two days, we picked our one hectare site surrounding the bodega. Of course this meant almost no delay at all between vine and press, and although this (Saturday) was still quite a busy day by normal standards, after our first two, quite frenetic days, it actually appeared to be quite relaxed.

Sunday morning was wet and cloudy and so we made a decision to stop. It transpired that not much rain actually fell, and with hindsight we could have probably picked by late morning, but in all honesty, it felt really good to take a breath.

It rained a little more during Sunday night, but Monday morning was dry, and by 11am it was actually sunny. With stormy weather (the tail end of Hurricane Henri) predicted for the next two days it was time to gather fruit, but fast! In the end, Monday's kilos were only slightly less than day one, and in a matter of only 4 days we

had collected nearly 90% of our harvest, thanks in total to our teams both in the vineyard and the bodega. A heroic effort all around.

The predictions for Henri proved correct as a huge amount of water was dumped on Galicia over the next 36 hours. Not quite two days, as originally forecast, but still quite dramatic.



Angela can't resist tasting the yeast!

We resumed after a three day break to gather in the last few thousand kilos, and it was soon abundantly clear to us that this final grape must was more dilute, as quite naturally, our vines had absorbed a lot of water. We compensated for this in the cellar by dramatically reducing both the length of pressing time, and the actual pressure used, and made a conscious decision not to blend this must with anything that had entered before; it was markedly different quality

In summary 2015 was almost a perfect vintage - perhaps if Henri had arrived just one week later we probably would have achieved a slightly higher degree of alcohol (somewhere between 12 and 12.5%). In the event, we will have a wine of just a shade below 12%, which is actually quite typical of our albariños.

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 2015 (all measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 208,176 kg
Potential alcohol: 11.9 % alc/vol
Total acidity: 9.86 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3.03

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