

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report – 2016 – A hot, dry vintage

Late autumn and early winter of 2015/2016 was quite dry and mild by Galician standards. Certainly there were periods of rain and some cold days, but there were also quite a number of dry, sunny and warm days extending well into October.

November and December remained largely dry, as we managed to escape from some of the extreme rain storms that had touched parts of northern Europe (causing some quite severe flooding). Sunshine and clear skies at the very end of November yielded our first frosts of winter. With air temperatures hovering around freezing point at night and during the early morning, there were many areas touched by ground frost, albeit not really a 'hard' frost. It was cold enough however, to let us get into the vineyards to start the most difficult chore of winter – the pruning.

The second half of December however, was abnormally warm, with some very mild winds blowing in from the Sahara. In the period leading up to Christmas our daytime temperatures were still climbing as high as 16/17°C (61/63°F), and our nights were not much cooler.

The more usual winter rains came with a vengeance in 2016! It rained continuously for the first two weeks of January - from dawn 'til dusk. This unsettled, stormy, wet weather continued well into February, making it really uncomfortable for our pruning team working out in the vineyards.

The early part of the spring remained largely unsettled, with periods of rain interspersed with an odd day of sunshine. One of the significant features of this period however, was the change in temperature. The thermometer was up and down like the proverbial yo-yo, never excessively cold, but still with some very wide swings of temperature.

At the very beginning of May, in the period leading up to flowering we experienced a short burst of hot sunshine, but again this was short lived. The unsettled and highly unpredictable

weather continued until the end of the month, raising concerns for a successful flowering.

As luck would have it, we experienced a dry spell at almost exactly the right moment, and the flowering was all but complete before more rain returned. Consequently there were just a few uneven bunches ('couloire' or 'millerandage' as the French call it). However, the rest were looking good, and actually quite abundant.

The latter half of June and early July saw a big improvement in both sunshine and warmth. Temperatures regularly reaching the mid-to-high 20's, sometimes touching 30°C (mid 70's to mid 80's °F). This hot weather continued almost completely unabated throughout July, with perhaps only two cloudy days, and only one day of light rain. Temperatures continued for the whole month around the 30°C (86°F) mark.

August continued with very similar conditions to July – hot and dry. Perhaps the heat dropped by a few degrees, but it nearly always remained in the higher mid-20's C (77-86°F). Only one day of light drizzle and a couple of hours of rain one morning was all we saw during the month.



A temporary office in the middle of the pressing room
– very, very noisy

In fact, this lack of rainfall continued into September and right up to the penultimate moment. With the final maturation being rapidly accelerated by the heat, and acidity in the fruit dropping by the day, we were poised and ready to pick. On Monday 12th September, a rather grey, cool and overcast morning, our team swung into action.

With a new enthusiastic team of helpers in the bodega, more vehicles and more drivers, the grapes started to arrive faster than ever. Our guys were working flat out to cope, with hardly a moment to draw breath. In a way it was a scene of controlled chaos.

And so it transpired that by the end of the first day, we had already gathered about 23% of the projected harvest – the presses worked all night and the bodega team were almost dead on their feet. Clearly we had overstepped the mark a little, and would need to slow things down for the subsequent days. At 11pm on the first day (with all the day's harvest safely inside), it started to rain quite heavily! Ironically, the first real rain in nearly three months, and on the very day that we had decided to pick!

After the initial heavy downpour, it continued more steadily throughout the night, but had already stopped well before dawn of the following day. Over the next two days, the weather remained unsettled (and unpredictable), and so as a precaution, we decided to suspend picking.



All cases are carefully washed before being re-used to collect more grapes – next year we need to buy a machine!

On this occasion, believe it or not, the rain was not a total disaster. Apart from the initial downpour, the quantity of rain was not too excessive, and because the fruit was so

healthy, it did not make any significant difference, apart from washing dust from the bunches. (After prolonged periods of dry weather the grapes can become quite dusty). By Friday morning, after one completely dry day on Thursday 15th, we once again set out on our mission, but this time with a very favourable weather forecast for the coming days.

The next four days (Friday through Sunday), went pretty much without a hitch, retaining our high tempo and constant flow of grapes, albeit not quite as excessive as day one. The grapes themselves were healthy (and clean), but most importantly, analysis was revealing an almost perfect balance in terms of sugar, pH and acidity. Potential alcohol was pushing 12.5%, perhaps just a little more than our average, but really very good nonetheless.

By Tuesday 20th September, we were already gathering our final bunches, and as we always do at the end of our last day, calculating the exact kilos needed to load the presses (each press has a maximum and minimum load, outside which we will damage the machinery). Despite the fact that our yield of kilos per hectare was down this year (owing to the very dry summer, and smaller berries), we were still more than delighted with the quality of our fruit. I think I commented some time ago, that small can sometimes mean very beautiful.

Our tasting of the grape musts only served to prove exactly what we had expected – they are ripe, concentrated, packed with fruit, and should produce a very aromatic albariño. Because we also managed to retain the correct acidity, it should also be well balanced. *Vamos a ver!*

You can find a detailed day-by-day account of this year's harvest by visiting either Bodegas Castro Martin on Facebook, or our blog page on www.castromartin.com

Technical details of 2016 (all measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 224,537 kg

Potential alcohol: 12.4 % alc/vol

Total acidity: 9.5 gm/litre (tartaric)

pH: 3.01

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