

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report 2003 – It's a hot one!

If 2002 was the year of excessive rainfall causing floods around Europe, then 2003, by complete contrast, must go down as the year of excessive heat. This year saw record temperatures in London, drought in Italy and France, and dramatic forest fires cutting swathes across the continent (suffered especially badly by our neighbours in Portugal).

Here in Galicia, the year started quite normally, with a week or two of frost during the early part of the year, a fairly uneventful spring, leading to a healthy flowering and fruit set. During the months of June and July there was some rainfall, that required just a little intervention in the vineyards to prevent disease - and then August arrived, and so did the heat! More than two weeks of unbroken sunshine with average temperatures of more than 30°C (86°F), peaking on many days at over 40°C (more than 104°F).

Our slightly misinformed local press reported that this heat and sunshine was excellent for the grapes, and no doubt this would be an excellent harvest in Galicia..... not so. In extremes of temperature nature takes over and the inbuilt self-preservation system within the vine is activated. The plant effectively shuts down, and rather than increasing, sugars are used as an aid to the vine's very survival.

The first weekend of September was cold and wet, but then fine weather returned, the heat not as intense as August, and so better for the grape sugars (Galician journalists please take note). The weekend before picking was due to begin saw a few more downpours, but after a day or so the skies cleared, the sun returned, and so the grape pickers started to emerge.

At Castro Martin we started on Tuesday 23rd September under clear blue sky with a very pleasant 24°C (75°F) and our fingers firmly crossed behind our backs! With such good weather, and a bad forecast ahead of us it became a race against time to bring in as many completely healthy (and dry) grapes as

possible. With the threat of rain as motivation, grapes were very soon arriving by the truckload.

Within each 24-hour cycle at harvest time, there is a huge contrast between daytime and night time activity. During the day, the outward appearance of the bodega is one of calm, peace and tranquillity - evenings and nights however, are quite a different story.....



George W. - full-time leader of the "free world" and part-time grape supplier to Bodegas Castro Martin!

From about 5pm onwards, the harvest delivery "rush-hour" begins in Barrantes, and as always, every conceivable shape and size of vehicle is involved – tractors, vans, cars, etc.

The presses swing into overdrive, as they devour case after case of fresh, golden/green Albariño grapes. In honesty, it would be fair to say that this year's harvest required just a little more sorting than last year, but by far the vast majority of grapes arrived healthy, dry and in good condition. Although the actual reception of grapes effectively ends at around midnight or 1am, the "night crew" are kept busy throughout their shift, and really earn every cent of their salaries. By morning calm is somehow miraculously restored, and only a little tidying up required.

On day two the weather remained as sunny and warm as day one, but as a little cloud appeared on day three, so anxiety around the

region increased and the pace quickened even more. Contrary to the forecast, (that naturally we had been following very closely), Friday produced the first shower that lasted for an hour or so, but this was light and not even heavy enough to stop the picking. Saturday (day 5), predicted as the worst day by the weather forecasters, turned out to be sunny and warm – such are the vagaries of the Galician climate!

After 5 days of working at a furious pace, spirits were high, but limbs were a little weary. With no immediate threat from the weather, and only a day or two of picking still to complete, we decided to respect Sunday as a day of rest, and closed the Bodega to go home for a good nights sleep.



Proud father with our next generation of grape suppliers

On Monday morning it was a little difficult to get the motors going again (and we don't mean the machinery!) However, as most of the harvest was by now safely in the cellar, we knew we were on the 'home stretch', and the day was much more relaxed than the frenetic pace of the early days. By Monday evening, with more ripe Albariño grapes in our presses, we were almost finished, and all that remained was a little mopping up in the last few sites. And just as well..... when we opened the shutters on Tuesday morning we had more rain, but again only for an hour or two.

With only a few hundred kilos left to collect, our tanks more or less full, and one of our good neighbours looking for grapes, there was a simple solution open to us. Our dedication to quality made it easy for us to decide to sell the last few kilos – not because the grapes were

bad, but merely because we were very happy with the must that we had in the tanks, and did not want to take the risk of spoiling it!

After 7 working days, we had collected just under 200,000 kilos (or 10,000 of our 20 kilo baskets), so there will be no shortage of good wine for our customers this year. Obviously it is too early to say definitively what the finished wine will be like, but certainly, judging by the sugar levels, and our first taste of the must, there is no reason why 2003 should not be a very good quality Albariño.

The must itself reveals a wonderfully fragrant floral nose (if we could capture all of this in the bottle it would sell better than Calvin Klein!) and as usual, a rich, intense fruit packed with a multitude of exotic flavours – lemon, lime, pineapple, melon, apple, pear, kiwi and rounded off with a touch of honeysuckle.

For the technically minded the spec of the 2003 harvest is as follows:

Total kilos picked: 198,127 kilos
Alcohol Av: 11,7°
Total Acidity: 10,4 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3,10

(N.B. At this stage our figures are only the estimated average)



The best restaurant in Barrantes – under the pergolas in El Pazo

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