

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report 2005 – A “textbook” vintage!

Every year I start my report with a brief summary of the weather conditions that we have experienced over the course of our growing season. With each passing year, however, it seems to be increasingly difficult to summarise this in just a few sentences, simply as these so-called “patterns” are becoming more unusual and more unpredictable. Suffice to say that not only Galicia, but the whole of Spain, experienced it's **driest winter for decades** – wall to wall sunshine for most of January, February and the early part of March. Daytime temperatures in spring and early summer fluctuating by as much as 10°C (18°F) within the space of 48 hours, but fortunately with perfect weather occurring at the more critical moments – **flowering** for example, during a week at the start of **June with temperatures in the low 30's C** (86°F). (Later in June we also experienced the wettest day of the year – proof, if it were needed, of the weather's instability).

July continued in pretty much in the same vein – a few hot days interspersed with cooler, overcast days, and a few showers.



Young shoots emerge under cloudless skies in El Pazo

The month of **August** in Spain was rather reminiscent of 2003, tinder dry forests igniting at the slightest spark – on some days up to **30 separate fires** burning in Galicia alone. Temperatures however, were not too excessive, but still our vines were a little stressed by the lack of water.



Fire rages over the seaside town of Sanxenxo, Galicia

At the calendar ticked over into **September** so the weather changed – the first ten days or so were **much cooler**, down in the low 20's C (low 70's F). However, the most significant change being the arrival of some fairly persistent rain. At first a bit of a blessing, but after a few days, more of a worry.

Despite the poor weather our days were enlightened by the visit of one of South Africa's top Chenin Blanc makers. **Teddy Hall** has won **South Africa's top Chenin prize** for four out of the last five years! (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005 – we don't know what went wrong in 2003!) A friend from my previous life as wine buyer, I invited Teddy for a sort of “cultural exchange”, to learn more about our denomination and grape variety. It was quite a revelation, and served to highlight the different approach to winemaking between the old and new world – this was my plan exactly, as I had always believed that there were benefits to be gained by both sides in such a get-together.

OK, so, finally, after all my ramblings let's move on to the harvest itself.....

The days leading up to picking were perfect – warm sunny days in the mid 20's (mid 70's) and fresh, cool nights. After careful monitoring of grape sugars, acid and pH **we started our picking under blue skies on 22nd September**. Benefiting from these cool nights, our grapes were arriving in optimum condition, and faster than ever (thanks to more than 35 people working in the vineyards). The 20kg baskets were loaded into the presses within an hour or two, and **pressed even more gently than before** in order to minimise any phenolic flavours in the grape must.

This year we have also given the juice a longer and **much cooler settling period**, simply to produce a cleaner must, making it easier to separate and collect the best and most nourishing lees during racking. Small but significant changes that we believe will further enhance our quality.

In reality, the first three or four days of picking were quite uneventful, except that day three was a little overcast but still dry. Sunday morning (25th Sept) brought a short sharp shower, but within an hour what little water had penetrated the canopy had completely evaporated, and picking re-started once again under blue skies.

Our **annual "crisis"** came on day six, when a membrane in one of the two **presses exploded** (a repeat of our 2002 disaster!) Our dilemma was further compounded when not one, but two of our largest tanks sprang leaks from their special racking mechanisms (they had worked perfectly until two days before!). After much begging and grovelling to our technical support people, the tank problem was resolved within a few hours, but in the absence of a new membrane, we decided to limp on to the end of the harvest with only one press.



Teddy Hall exchanges ideas with Angela..... "Canopy what?"

So, after seven days of the usual frenzied activity, the final kilos were picked – initial analysis showed **good grape sugars, with a low level of acidity and correct pH.**

Of course the actual harvesting of grapes is only the first part of the story, and is always followed by several weeks of hard labour in the cellars. As many of you will already know, our philosophy has always been to **innovate where possible, but to always respect the**

traditions of the denomination. With the ambition that we have (to be simply the best) we are always looking for ways to enhance what we do – many of the changes that we make each year are small and seemingly insignificant, but when added together, we believe that the improvements we have made **will be reflected in your glass.**



Ripe Albariño grapes come in many different colours.

Our first tasting of the unfermented must this year reveals a **very clean, fresh, well defined fruit**, and a seemingly good balance between the sugar and the natural acidity (it could be that we may need slightly less malo this year - see TA figure below). As in previous years there is a **very aromatic, floral character** that we have come to associate with young Albariño, and it could also be that the wine has a slightly deeper colour*. Time will tell, and we eagerly await our first post-fermentation tastings.

*There are many different clones of Albariño, some quite green - in our own vineyards (and many of those that we buy from), the ripe grapes have a deep, gold colour, which may account for the colour of the must.

And, as always, here is the technical spec of the 2005 harvest:

Total kilos picked: 221,363 kilos
Alcohol Av: 12.51°
Total Acidity: 8.51 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3.048

(N.B. Analysis based on grape must at harvest)

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