

# BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

## Harvest Report 2018 – A 'late developer'

Perhaps the most significant feature of both the 2016 and 2017 vintages was the lack of rainfall, not only during the growing period, but also during the preceding winters. Following the 2017 harvest, the dry weather continued well into October with some days actually hotter than the summer had been. Forecasts of rain simply did not materialise and apart from an odd day or two, it remained largely dry.

During November, the weather changed a little, as the clear blue skies disappeared, but even so the lack of rainfall continued until the end of the year (interspersed by only one or two short, wet periods). January was very unpredictable, with rain, scattered thunderstorms, one or two odd days of sun and temperatures sometimes reaching 18°C (65°F). The coldest winter days were reserved for the first week of February when it remained cold both day and night.

March was no better – cold and very wet with a penetrating humidity. The only positive note was that the low water table from the last couple of dry vintages, was finally being replenished. This damp weather not only made it uncomfortable for pruning, but also delayed the start of the growing season. The first signs of life appearing perhaps up to two weeks later than normal.

Spring finally arrived around mid-April, when blue skies appeared and the thermometer leapt by as much as 6 or 7°C (14°F) overnight. The combination of warmth and moisture in the soil dramatically accelerated growth. Optimism was, however, short-lived, and cooler than average temperatures resulted in a late flowering in far from ideal conditions. By this time the growing cycle was as much as 3-4 weeks behind schedule. In May and June, we also witnessed a strange weather phenomenon that was to persist throughout the early summer. Northern Europe was experiencing considerably higher average temperatures than Galicia, by as much as 5-10°C (10-15°F). Normally these temperatures would be the complete reverse.

July remained mostly in the mid-20's °C and rarely touched 30°C. Sunshine appeared at times, but not for extended periods.

Thankfully August was more settled – sunny and warm, with just a few very hot days in excess of 30°C (into the 90's F). These warmer, more stable conditions continued into September and obviously helped to accelerate the delayed maturity. With only a couple of cloudy days and hardly any rain worth speaking of, the fruit was mature and ripe for picking by Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> – the third week of the month, almost exactly as we had predicted.



Angela surveys for any missed bunches!

On a beautiful sunny morning we started to pick our 'Castrelo' vineyard – the most distant from our cellar (only about 8km, but still 15-20 minutes by road). The reason I mention distance is that this was perhaps the only hiccup it what proved to be a largely uneventful day. I had made some (apparently unwarranted) changes to our transport arrangements, which, to cut a long story short, caused a significant backlog of grapes waiting to be transported – entirely my fault. However, the good news was that the grapes themselves were completely healthy, and were in much better shape than we could have ever imagined back in the spring.

Our second day dawned shrouded in a thick Galician sea mist, creating cool, almost damp conditions. We knew, however, that this would probably be 'burnt off' quite quickly by the sun (and we were not wrong in this assumption). This was to be a reasonably quiet day, with fewer grapes arriving than our first day, but thanks to some adjustments to our transport schedule, at least they did arrive in a more timely manner!

The most significant part of this day was the inauguration of our brand new case washing machine. So new in fact, that it had only arrived at the very end of our first day of harvest. (I

perhaps shouldn't mention that this was ordered in March, in plenty of time, or so we thought).

The idea was that this new machine would wash and re-cycle our grape harvesting cases almost as quickly as they could be emptied into the presses. No more piles of dirty cases, and no more people standing with hosepipes – or that was the theory at least (but that's another story).

With the remote threat of rain that actually never materialised, we launched into day three. At the same time our work inside the bodega began, as we started to move the clean, 'settled' grape juice into clean tanks. Despite intense activity both inside and outside, our third day was again uneventful, albeit that certain characteristics of the vintage did start to emerge. For example, after two very dry months the vineyards were full of dust, and of course, at least some of this had adhered itself to the fruit, meaning that the juice from the pressing was just a little dark and murky. (Of course, once settled, it re-emerges completely clear). Secondly, we noticed that the sugar levels, and therefore the potential alcohol, was also atypically high, with many grapes being measured at around the 13% mark.

By Saturday morning, our fourth day, the sky had cleared, and the blue sky was broken only in late afternoon by a grey haze caused by a small, localised, forest fire. Fortunately, it did not spread! From a picking standpoint, Saturday would normally be one of our peak days, when grape suppliers who have full-time jobs (merely growing fruit as a part-time 'weekend hobby'), prefer to pick in earnest. It was certainly quite busy, but our peak was still to come....

Sunday, day five, was hot (in every sense of the word) with the late September temperature touching 30°C (86°F). It transpired that far from being the 'day of rest', it turned out to be by far the busiest for us, and by some distance. As the day wore on heat and the volume of fruit began to take its toll on some very tired bodies within our team. Thankfully this unyielding flow of fruit meant that by Monday, the end was already on the near horizon.

Monday, day six, turned out to be our final day, as we scampered around gathering in the final bunches. Despite being comparatively quiet, it was still a long day, as every grape needed to be inside before the final presses could be loaded.

Meanwhile, in our laboratory, analysis was yielding some quite unexpected results. The grape must was highly concentrated, and despite the high levels of alcohol, still had a very good balancing acidity. Tasting of the juice confirmed this, with ripe, exotic fruits on the nose, and a full-bodied, yet well balanced in the mouth. 2018 it appears, could potentially be a very good vintage, much better than we could possibly have anticipated back in the Spring!



The final few cases of 2018 from our 'Bodega' vineyard

You can find a more 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](http://www.castromartin.com)

**Technical details of 2018 (all measurements at harvest):**

**Total kilos harvested: 201,154 kg**  
**Potential alcohol: 12.7 % alc/vol**  
**Total acidity: 8.2 gm/litre (tartaric)**  
**pH: 3.15**

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