

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report 2020 ~ The Corona Vintage

My annual vintage report is actually written over the course of the year. Each month I sit down for a few moments and add updates about the weather and how this might impact development in the vineyard. Little did I know at the start of 2020 how this year's story would unfold.....

Unlike the previous year when October had provided us with something of an 'Indian Summer', October of 2019 was quite different. The first half cool and changeable, and the second cool and wet (actually providing some much needed rain).

November was probably the wettest month for more than a year, with rain almost every day, including some quite torrential. After two dry summers we could not complain, it was very much what we needed. The sun did not return until early December, when clear skies yielded our first ground frost of the winter. This sun however, was short lived, and the blue skies did not return again until Christmas.

After a bright and sunny holiday period January was very changeable. Some days of warm, bright sunshine, some windy days, and then some wet and stormy days (the latter hardly ideal for our pruning of the vineyards).

The months of February and March were not particularly cold and were completely frost-free. To the contrary, we actually enjoyed some long periods of dry, sunny weather, interspersed by just a few odd days of rain. By March, on some of the sunnier days, daytime temperatures were occasionally pushing towards 20°C (68°F), and as a result, bud break was already well under way.

Of course, the other highly significant event at this time was the arrival of Coronavirus. First reported in the country at the end of January, and forcing a complete lock down by the middle of March. Although pruning was completed at around this time, the vines did not stop growing, and still required our attention throughout.

April was changeable, there was no discernible pattern to the weather at all, some dry days, some wet days – not only favourable growing

conditions, but also an increased possibility of the onset of disease. Close vigilance was, as always, required. May was warmer, and also drier, by the end of the month a short heatwave produced temperatures of over 30°C (86°F). This improved weather did, however, provide us with excellent conditions for flowering.

In early July Galicia was hit by something of a heatwave. The entire month was completely dry and with temperatures hovering at or above 30°C (86°F) on a regular basis, I believe that this was perhaps the hottest, driest July for more than 50 years.

It wasn't until mid-August that we experienced any rainfall. Almost a week of significant rain and slightly cooler temperatures gave the vineyards at least some degree of respite from the extreme heat. After a long period of intense temperatures, two or three days of significant rain can sometimes cause problems. If berries are small and thick-skinned (slightly dehydrated), and they are suddenly fed water, then they can swell quickly causing their thick skins to split, which will inevitably lead to the onset of rot. Very fortunately, in the case of our fruit, this did not happen, and the rain served only to add a little flesh to the berries and also to refresh the vines.

After a week or so of this indifferent weather the heat returned, and so it remained until the middle of September.

We had already started taking grape samples in late August the results of which led to a decision to start picking on Monday 7th September.



Checking temperatures on the first day

On Sunday 6th September our entire picking team underwent Covid testing - happily no one tested positive. With this behind us, the next morning we started the day with a new routine of taking everyone's temperature. This was followed by a one-hour session of Covid training, the objective being to explain the rules of our 'new normal'. For example, that social distancing applies in the vineyard and not just in the street! Finally, we started to gather some fruit!

Under these new restrictions, and with slightly fewer people this year, we knew that progress in our own vineyards could be slightly slower than normal. To balance this, we compensated by inviting more of our best grape suppliers to pick simultaneously. Of course, this would cause a few more complications in the bodega, (the need to allocate musts to separate tanks to retain individual provenance), but it did ensure at least, that we had a steady flow of grapes throughout the day, thus keeping our presses fully occupied.

After our slightly delayed start the first grapes arrived around lunch time, and by early afternoon the first juices of 2020 were flowing into our tanks. Grapes were very healthy and upon analysis, revealed an excellent balance of sugar, acidity and pH. As with our last two vintages, and also as a result of the hot weather, sugar (and therefore potential alcohol) was slightly elevated, so we will see what effect this has on the finished wine. Perhaps between 12.5% and 13%?



Our bodega vineyard overlooking the Salnés Valley

The grape must itself was clean and fresh, but also viscous, with an unctuous, full, ripe sweetness, already giving us cause for optimism and providing us with an excellent raw material.

The harvest itself was conducted under blue skies and unbroken sunshine. In temperatures of around 30°C (86°F) for the entire 7 days of

picking it made the burden of wearing masks that bit more uncomfortable for all involved. Not just a perspiring body, but a clammy face as well....

This year saw the first use of our very new digital temperature control system, with touch screen and remote access. As we slowly filled our small tanks, one-by-one, everything went perfectly, until we started to rack some of these smaller tanks (9,000 litres) into our larger tanks (nearly three times the size). There was clearly something wrong with the installation, and it appeared as though our large tanks had almost been wired in reverse! An urgent technicians visit didn't really improve the situation, and it was actually one of our own people that uncovered the problem – faulty connections in the electro valves. This was swiftly corrected, and proved to be the only minor technical crisis of the vendimia.

The rest of the harvest passed off without incident and our experienced team worked like the well-oiled machine that it is. Of course, controlling the flow of grapes into the bodega does help, as we can quite simply prevent too many extreme peaks or troughs of activity, when our cellar guys are not working to their full potential. Having said that, the reality is that there are always chores to catch up on, and they always work very hard to earn their euros.

Finally, seeing our yield/kilo slightly up on last year (but still slightly below average), we can now give our full attention to the cellar and start the slow, careful process of turning our excellent 2020 fruit into an excellent 2020 albariño. Let's hope that with all the trials and tribulations that this year had brought us so far, we can at least salvage something positive by making this a vintage to remember!

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

Technical details of 2020 (Av. measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 174,269 kg

Potential alcohol: 12.8% alc/vol

Total acidity: 9.2gm/litre (tartaric)

pH: 3.04

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

PUXAFEITA 3 | 36636 RIBADUMIA | PONTEVEDRA | ESPAÑA

TEL: (+34) 986 71 02 02 | FAX: (+34) 986 71 06 07

website and blog: www.castromartin.com

e-mail: info@castromartin.com