

# BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

## Harvest Report 2021 ~ A complicated year!

This year's report was delayed by a complete re-write! It contains much less about weather during the year (albeit I still have all my notes), and much more about the exceptionally difficult year that 2021 has turned out to be.

Having said all that, I will start with an abridged summary of this year's weather, as of course, this is fundamental to the development of the fruit, and will ultimately determine the quality of the vintage.

In many ways, the winter of 2021/2022 was typically Galician – mostly cold and wet. It is not too often that the temperature in Salnés falls below freezing, but clear skies in early January resulted in some odd days of fairly hard frost. (Useful for killing pests in the vineyards).

This bright, cold snap was followed by a month or two of persistent rain, making conditions quite tough for pruning, although the job was completed by mid-March (just in time for bud break). The second half of March provided us with a little spring sunshine, that came as a welcome break after a long winter of lockdown.

April and May were changeable (as we would expect), although some dry, sunny weather did appear just in time for flowering around mid-May.



Loading pallets of grapes in the vineyard

In the months that followed perhaps the most significant feature of our weather was the temperature. The summer never really took off, in the sense that, despite having some perfectly pleasant sunshine, the thermometer never rose much above the mid-20's °C (75-80°F), with the exception of a few odd days. Coupled with this,

nights were much cooler than we would normally expect (which are actually quite welcome during periods of excessive heat). However, when temperatures are more temperate, this will inevitably result in lower sugar (potential alcohol) and higher retention of acidity, more especially in a grape variety such as albariño.

After some indifferent weather in July and August, the first week of September was really not too good at all. Cool temperatures, overcast skies and a fair amount of rain. With the harvest date forecast for the middle of the month, these were certainly not the conditions that we needed.

The harvest of 2021 started on Thursday September 16<sup>th</sup>, thankfully under clear blue skies. In a change to our normal grape collection system, we introduced pallets into our vineyards, meaning that the individual cases of grapes would be palletised in the vineyard and then collected by truck to be transported to the bodega. Using such a system not only reduces the amount of labour that we need in our grape reception, but also reduces the number of journeys from vineyard to cellar. One truckload being the equivalent of at least 4 tractor journeys (thereby reducing our carbon footprint).

Picking on day two was suspended at lunchtime following a short, but significant downpour. However, this was only a short delay and normal service was resumed on Saturday. Well, not quite 'normal' – after the hours lost on Friday, we not only received this delayed fruit, but also our usual, frenetic Saturday intake. It turned out to be a long, busy and exhausting weekend!

Meanwhile, there were a couple of distinctive characteristics that we noticed quite early on. Certainly, as inferred earlier, the potential alcohol was much lower than recent vintages, but also the amount of liquid yielded per kilo of grapes was significantly lower than usual. Despite total kilos in the vineyards being well up, the actual amount of grape must generated was not quite as high as we would have expected.

Fortunately, the bright September sun stayed with us throughout the week, and despite just one or two minor technical problems (quickly resolved), the 2021 harvest came to a close after 7½ days of picking.

In a change to the normal format of previous vintage reports I will now move on to the other very significant factors that have, and will, influence our 2021 production, quality and pricing.

Of course, there are a couple noticeable differences to the 2021 grape musts; the temperate summer and cool nights meaning that this year's wine will, in many ways, be a much more typical Salnés Valley albariño. A clean, focused, lively wine, with fresh acidity and a much more 'traditional' level of alcohol. Following on from the much smaller and higher alcohol vintages of 2019 and 2020, this change to the characteristics will certainly provide quite a contrast.

And so we now move on to the other significant events of 2021.

When the Covid pandemic first kicked in, the only sector of our industry that was still providing a viable outlet for selling were the supermarkets. Hotels, bars and restaurants were at a complete standstill, and as soon as some bodegas realised this, they jumped in quickly and started to offload albariño at discounted prices.



Discharging pallets of grapes at the bodega

In reality, no one could have predicted what happened next.... The sudden flood of business that ensued the moment that the on-trade sector started to re-awaken. The orders came flooding in, and for those bodegas that had already sold significant volumes (of their smaller 2019/20 vintages) to the supermarkets, they started to run out of wine completely! For a small region like ours this had an important knock-on effect. Many grapes are still supplied to bodegas by small growers, and this acute shortage of stock would mean that grape supply would be severely squeezed and prices would spike dramatically.

During 2021 we had already experienced many, very significant increases to the price of our 'dry goods' – bottles, capsules, corks and most significantly, carton. (Carton had increased four times in the first 10 months of the year, as demand for packaging far outstripped supply).

Energy prices also surged as the sudden, renewed demands of industry put enormous pressure on supplies, serving only to fuel this never-ending upward spiral of tariffs even more.

Finally, to complete the 'Perfect Storm' the world's supply chain was almost at a standstill. Shipping containers were in short supply, and when they were eventually available, shippers started imposing much higher tariffs than ever before. Businesses that in the past had relied on a 'just in time' ordering system were thrown into disarray, again having a huge impact on the price and availability of certain commodities. For example, many of our dry goods suppliers simply could not get the raw materials that they needed to make goods. It was all very dramatic and even today is a long way from being resolved.

In summary, I think we should simply be thankful that 2021 was quite an abundant vintage (despite the lower yield of juice per kilo). If there had been yet another small harvest I shudder to think what might have happened to the price of our wine. Already burdened with increases from every side there certainly was the potential for complete disaster, but thankfully it appears that this worst-case scenario has been avoided.

I often have to remind myself that we are, in fact, humble fruit farmers, and that in the end we can only make the best out of what nature provides us. Sometimes this is not always easy!

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 2021 (Av. measurements at harvest):**

**Total kilos harvested: 205,736 kg**  
**Potential alcohol: 12.2% alc/vol**  
**Total acidity: 9.4gm/litre (tartaric)**  
**pH: 3.12**

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