

BODEGAS CASTRO MARTIN

Harvest Report 2022 ~ Our 40th Harvest

Our founder, Domingo Martin, built the current cellar in 1981, with our first harvest celebrated in 1982 (a full six years **before** the D.O. of Rias Baixas was even established). This year will be our 40th harvest.

It was another atypical growing season in 2022 (as it has been in a number of recent years). There were not only periods of relatively wet weather, but also many weeks of very hot, dry conditions. Unfortunately, these did not always occur at the time that we most needed them.

The months of November, December, and January were unseasonably dry (January with hardly any rainfall worth mentioning). For Galicia, and for our vineyards, these are simply not the conditions that we need – traditionally winter is the time of year top-up our water table.



Loading trucks in our vineyards

It wasn't really until early March that we experienced some heavy downpours, albeit that the winter of 21/22 would still be classified as dry. During April we welcomed several more spring showers, but again, nowhere near enough to compensate for the shortfalls of winter. The only positive factor relating to weather was that temperatures remained cool, if not cold, through until the end of the month.

May and June were a little different, largely alternating between rain and warm sunshine. Flowering took place during the latter half of

May, and did so under mainly dry conditions, meaning that there were no major concerns.

Despite the dry winter, these alternating periods of warm and then wet conditions during May and June resulted in what is known as 'vine vigour', when the vegetation grows exceptionally quickly. Our normally well-manicured vineyards actually started to look quite abandoned!

Of course, the other potential risk of alternating wet and then warm weather is that of disease. Humidity under the canopy of our pergolas creates ideal conditions for mould and fungal growth, and therefore some treatments by means of spraying are required. Naturally, we use the most ecologically friendly products that we can find. (Of course, the damp, humid conditions of our region also explains why it is perhaps more difficult to find many organic or biodynamic wines).

From virtually the first day of July everything changed. Although we had enjoyed some sunshine during May and June, temperatures had always remained stubbornly low... until July.

Within a week or two of the start of the month the thermometer started to hit 30°C or more (85-90°F). From there it climbed even more, and at one point in the middle of July we actually touched 40°C (104°F) which is unheard of on the coast of Galicia. Further inland this can occur in summer, but near to the Ocean, almost never.

These abnormally hot conditions continued into August, our only respite being some days of sea mist rolling in from the Atlantic. Whilst we did experience a couple of showers in the middle of the month, these hardly penetrated the canopy, and our vines started to show signs of stress from the heat and lack of water. At this time we started to anticipate yet another harvest of high alcohol and lower yields as bunches were small and the berries appeared to contain less pulp. Lower yields could also, potentially, compound yet another crisis that was developing within our D.O.

In recent years the demand for albariño around the world has continued to grow, and whilst there are many new plantings, these will not produce any useable fruit for at least the next few years. The supply of grapes, therefore, has come under intense pressure, and to cut a long story short, the simple laws of supply and demand has

resulted in some fairly hefty price increases, at a time when our economies are shrinking. It defies any real logic, but unfortunately it has become a fact that we will simply have to live with (and also face the consequences of).

As we approached harvest time at the beginning of September our weather changed, but not necessarily in a bad way. We experienced some periods of heavy rain, which, under normal circumstances might spell disaster. However, in 2022 this was something of a blessing. Our fruit was now provided with some much-needed hydration, and, owing to the extremely healthy nature of the bunches our grapes were able to absorb more liquid without any apparent damage or onset of disease.

After studying numerous vineyard samples we started our 40th anniversary harvest on Thursday 8th September. Despite starting under bright skies, we knew that in 2022 we might well be dodging the showers. Indeed, the forecast for the coming days indicated that rain was on the way.

As the fruit arrived in the bodega (mainly delivered by trucks, and already palletised in the vineyards), we made the first definitive assessment of our fruit. As already mentioned, the bunches were completely healthy, and our initial analysis showed slightly elevated alcohol and perhaps a little less acidity than we would have wished for. The grape must itself, however, was clean, fresh and fruity with good body and a seemingly good balance. (It is always difficult to judge at such an early stage, but perhaps a better result than we had imagined a week or two earlier, before the last-minute rain).

No vintage at Castro Martin would be complete without at least one or two technical issues, and 2022 was to be no exception. The minor issues included a broken-down tractor, intermittent issues with our case washing machine, and a problem with our printer in the grape reception. Whilst the most serious issue involved the complete breakdown of one of our presses (on only our second day), losing at least three hours of precious pressing time. Of course, three hours doesn't sound like too much, but when the 'grape cascade' is flowing, any bottleneck in the grape processing chain creates an immediate backlog.

Another complication of the 2022 vintage was a shortage of pickers. Finding good, reliable and experienced people is difficult at the best of

times, and to be very honest, standing all day in a hot vineyard reaching up to gather fruit from pergolas is a really tough job. This year, with many of the bodegas in our region picking at the same time, recruitment proved to be doubly difficult. Obviously, the major downside of fewer people gathering fruit is that grapes are arriving a little slower, and consequently our harvest was drawn out over one or two more days than usual.



The very healthy albariño grapes of 2022

After the first five days of picking, the forecast rain finally arrived, and work was suspended for two days. Fortunately, this rain was accompanied by a fresh breeze, meaning that the damp fruit was dried very quickly.

The concluding period of our 2022 harvest was conducted under blue skies, and so, after 10 long days, our journey finally came to its end.

At this point in my annual report, I would normally write that we can now start making wine, but, owing to the lost days and the extended nature of the harvest, our wine making was already well under way, and the first tanks already seeded. Let's see what we can do with 2022!

You can find a more detailed day-by-day account of this year's harvest by visiting either Bodegas Castro Martin on Facebook, Instagram or our blog page @ www.castromartin.com

Technical details of 2022 (Av. measurements at harvest):

Total kilos harvested: 185,537 kg
Potential alcohol: 12.7% alc/vol
Total acidity: 8.8 gm/litre (tartaric)
pH: 3.15

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