

# Reporte Vendimia 2003

## Introduction

Once again we find ourselves at the end of yet another Colchagua harvest. Now that the last grapes are in the press and the crushers have been switched off we finally have the time to breathe a sigh of relief and relate something of the wines created this year at Viu Manent.

## THE CLIMATE

Following a cold and wet 2002 winter, we experienced a spring which was equally cold and with relatively little sunlight. This delayed flowering by around two weeks in most varieties.

In contrast the beginning of 2003 was marked by a January with higher than average temperatures which accelerated ripening across the board. The hotter than average start to the year was followed by a cooler than normal February and March which particularly favoured the retention of natural acidity and fresh aromatics in the whites.

Due to the hotter than average January the white harvest kicked off earlier than usual with the first Chardonnay being picked on February 18th. Conversely the cooler temperatures following January resulted in the later reds (Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenere) being left to hang for longer to obtain optimum maturity, these varieties not being picked until mid May. This extended ripening along with a greater difference between day and night temperatures was advantageous in that it facilitated excellent tannin ripeness.

The other climatic factor worthy of note was the complete absence of any rain or morning mists from mid January until mid May which resulted in a harvest with zero levels of rot and completely healthy grapes. All of these climatic factors together contributed to a very good 2003 harvest overall.

## THE WINES

The Whites . The 2003 harvest marked a positive stylistic change in our white winemaking here at Viu Manent.

Our Sauvignon Blanc was the variety in which this change was perhaps the most obvious in 2003. This year, instead of carrying out leaf removal in mid January in order to open up the grapevine canopy and expose the fruit to additional sunlight, the canopy was left intact resulting in maximum fruit shading which in turn resulted in the

retention of natural acidity and also greener, fresher flavours. This year we also placed more emphasis on flavour development in the vineyard (with less attention being paid to the results of vineyard maturity according to sugar concentration, acidity and pH). Consequently the harvest was carried out in three distinct stages when we felt flavours were right. The first pick was carried out in late February (slightly earlier than normal) yielding a juice much higher in natural acidity and with very pungent herbaceous/stonefruit notes. The third and final pick was carried out in late March (slightly later than usual) resulting in a juice lower in acidity but with stronger tropical flavours showing abundant notes of pineapple, banana and papaw. Following the harvest each tank was fermented with one of four different pure strain yeasts in order to further increase blending options and therefore complexity. Now that the blends for the 2003 Reserve and Varietal Sauvignon Blanc have been assembled we can say with confidence that this is the best Sauvignon we have ever made here at Viu. Both wines are a statement of bright, racy acidity and freshness with clean, green flavours on the attack leading to lush tropical notes on the finish.

Our 2003 Chardonnay is also a very different beast compared with previous harvests. Once again it was apparent early on that the timing of the harvest was paramount to achieve a wine with the desired flavour characteristics. In order to achieve this there was a member of our winemaking team in the vineyard on a daily basis tasting each and every block during all of February and March. Due to the cooler temperatures during these months flavour development was ideal with the retention of a good deal of natural acidity along with a predominantly citrus flavour profile. A light leaf pluck was carried out approximately one week prior to the harvest in order to increase fruit exposure and therefore encourage the development of some 'creme brulee' type flavours in the grapes. The harvest commenced with the blocks destined for Reserve as these were carrying the lowest crop-load and thus ripened first. These blocks were hand-harvested, whole bunch pressed and barrel fermented producing a wine, which although still young, is already showing impressive structure and complexity. The Varietal Chard was machine harvested at night and given 12 hours of skin contact before being predominantly fermented in stainless steel tanks in order to produce a fresher, more fruit driven style. 15% of the blend was also fermented in second and third use oak barrels in order to impart an extra dimension of texture to the wine.

This harvest also marked the first year of significant Viognier production at Viu Manent. Viognier was first planted in our San Carlos estate in 1999 and previously has not yielded significant quantities of grapes. This year however with new blocks coming into production we have harvested enough Viognier to make a small volume. Our Viognier was the last white grape to be picked (being harvested in mid April). As is common with Viognier, crop levels were very low (around 7t/ha) with a lot of shrivel present accompanied by very high sugar levels (with almost 15° potential alcohol at harvest).

All of the grapes for the 2003 version were hand picked before being passed over the sorting table where any less than perfect grapes were carefully removed. The Viognier which we have in the winery today looks very promising indeed although still needs to spend some time in tank to really open-up and develop the classic apricot, papaya and quince characters for which the variety is famous.

Our Semillon Late Harvest 2003 is being gently squeezed in the press as we write this and thus it is a little difficult to comment on the wine at this point. It would however be fair to say that the 'noble rot' (*Botrytis cinerea*) affecting this grape has developed well and consequently we are hopeful that we will be able to produce another rich and concentrated version of this wine in 2003.

The Reds . The cooler than average temperatures during February/March which so favoured our white wines this year had the effect of delaying the ripening of our later ripening reds by 2-3 weeks.

In the case of our Cabernet Sauvignon this effect was fortunately offset by lower than average crop-loads along with an unseasonably warm April with unusually hot, sunny days and zero incidence of morning fogs. The end result was that although the Cabernet harvest was carried out around three weeks later than normal at both San Carlos and La Capilla a good level of maturity was obtained as indicated by both sugar levels and tannin ripeness. The first Cabernet harvest from El Olivar was also a pleasant surprise with some super ripe Cabernet harvested at over 14.5° potential alcohol.

In the case of our Malbec the cooler weather actually worked to our advantage as the cooler temperatures occurred just as the vines were completing their maturation. This has resulted in wines with serious fruit concentration, immense colour and structure but also with very soft sweet tannins which will make for wines with both the potential for long term cellar ageing but also which will be approachable whilst still young. The feeling amongst the winemaking team at this point is that it has to be the best Malbec harvest from San Carlos in the last ten years although we will need to give the wines at least a year in barrel before they will be able to prove us right. Worthy of mention here is that this year saw our first harvest of any quantity from El Olivar. Whilst still too young to draw any serious conclusions this years wines are already showing very good colour and fruit concentration and also strong tannins which required very careful management during fermentation in order to avoid any signs of overextraction.

As per usual La Capilla once again produced some excellent Merlot. Naturally low crops (as low as 4t/ha) along with careful harvesting from only the most balanced parts of the vineyard has resulted in the production of some very concentrated wines which will likely make up the backbone of our 2003 Reserve Merlot. The first Merlot harvest at El

Olivar this year was also a pleasant surprise. Despite some slight dehydration in the grapes at harvest the resulting wines are showing good structure and fruit. With a few more years to establish a more comprehensive root system and also lay down some carbohydrate reserves I think we can reasonably expect to see great Merlot coming from this vineyard.

Syrah is another variety with which we have been playing for several years with a small production from San Carlos. Previously we have not had the volume to be in a position to produce this wine commercially. This year however our San Carlos Syrah was joined by the first crop from El Olivar and together these two vineyards have produced two very different wines from which we should be able to arrive at an interesting blend. The San Carlos component whilst lighter in structure shows very bright acidity and lifted berry fruit characters over a slight hint of Eucalyptus. The El Olivar component on the other hand is much stronger in tannins with denser colour and more earthy, spicy characters. With time in barrel I think that both of these are going to evolve into very interesting wines.

2003 also resulted in some interesting Carmenera from La Capilla which, although perhaps not as super-ripe as we are accustomed to, shows a nose of dense spice with good colour and attractive sweet fruit accompanied by notes of sage and black tea.

Our Cabernet Franc, yet another debut from El Olivar, whilst only a small volume once again highlights the potential of this vineyard to produce dark, concentrated wines with an abundance of spicy fruit on the nose.

And last but certainly not least, the Sangiovese from San Carlos this year was a real surprise coming in with very high sugar concentration and a final alcohol of 15.8! What exactly we are going to do with this oddball remains to be seen.....

By

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