

Reporte Vendimia 2002

Introduction

At the end of the season, after turning off the last crushers, finally we have some time to sit and write about the new wines that were born this year. Every vintage challenge is different, and this was not the exception of the rule.

As a general conclusion, we had extraordinary conditions for white wines that turned into fresh, rich and lively wines. Our red wines, though still early since some of them do not finish malolactic fermentation yet, are deeply colored, with a wrapping body texture given by the tannins and high alcohol levels, in an elegant and delicate palate matrix.

The Estates

With three different approaches, we went for the grape quality this 2002.

On one hand, we had San Carlos Estate, the old original piece of land that with its clayish mid fertility soils we decided to not irrigate through all the season for all red grapes, and allowed only one irrigation for the white varieties (i.e., Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier). This mainly because we had enough water supply from the 2001 winter rains inside the soil, and also to control vigour. All these actions, plus a well brained pruning policy, gave little to mid size bunches, full in flavours and good acid/sugar ratio in white grapes, as total color skin and fruit driven aromas towards the collecting time in reds.

With its white sandy-loamy soil, La Capilla Estate matured soft, elegant and ripe red grapes, as expected every year. The particular location of the land, and the almost inexistent soil, gave the almost creamy structure that help us to configure a well balanced wine, when we make the final blends. Carmenere was very interesting this year here, with deep colored and backboned wines.

Finally, El Olivar Estate, gave its first commercial crops, with a couple of highlighted discoveries in terms of present quality and future potential: Malbec and Syrah. The results gave much more than what we expected for this year's crop. The decaying volcanic clay structure, within the steepy slopes, made muscled wines, rich, vividly colored for these two varieties, with clean framed aromatic profiles. Cabernet Franc had a good start, too, giving velvet-spicy flavours; nevertheless, we will keep forward to concentrate in the following years, to make a big wine out of this. For the Cabernet Sauvignon we had an average year, being a good one for Malbec and Merlot.

The Climate

We will remember Vintage 2002, as one of the most challenging vintages in Chile, in terms of climate. With some oenologists and winemakers we remembered some years in the 80`s, where a lot of skill was deployed to succeed.

Although unfair to “put all Chile in a sac” in relation to climate matters, some people still do. There were big differences between valleys: In Aconcagua, Maipo and Casablanca they had only a couple of rains. In Colchagua Valley we had two rains in March and also two in April, and a more complicated situation from Curico to the south.

In the first days of spring 2001, we warned some signs of unstable weather conditions until very late in the season. So, accordingly, we developed a full protection program, in red and white varieties, forecasting possible complications for the harvest time in 2002. Then, we were protected and waiting, ready to go.

At the end, rains did not touch our white grapes, so we could pick them intact. All the reds received the rains, and kept firm with their skins, and we held the grapes till we found the right maturation point to pick them. That was the difference, and that made the clue, to make rich round wines.

Report in White Wines

This vintage is the best vintage of Sauvignon Blanc us, in the last six years, and is really notorious, in terms of structure, elegance and crisp, with round voluptuous wines, filled with passion and peach fruit flavours. The cold temperatures in summer nights made an extraordinary quality to the fruit terpenes, getting a fine full aromatic grape skin. In our last tasting for qualifying the vintage, was declared as the Best Sauvignon Blanc we have made, that is a very good new, because Sauvignon Blanc 2001 was at the moment the best ever made, and was sold out almost entirely very soon. Also it is important to mention that we have more wine available this year 2002, in comparison to 2001.

The 2002 Chardonnay came with a full structured grape, better colored, with a wider mouth feel for the berries than in the latest editions of the varietal wines, mainly because our change in the viticultural trellis system of the varietal blocks in the field. In the last four years, we had a majority of Scott Henry trellis, which gave lighter wines, well balanced and in good harmony with the soil, that is predominantly clay there, being the only exception the vines of the Reserve blocks, that have always been in spalier. This 2002 vintage gave the first release of a change in the trellis, from Scott Henry to the traditional French low led bed spalier system. The wines clearly show a rich volume, both in varietal and reserve levels, are also well structured, round and creamy, and a higher percentage of malolactic fermentation was determined for the blends. Very interesting

flavour profiles, from our now classic banana skin to tropical fruits. This year was very well suited for an aromatic Chardonnay, with balanced acidity levels.

As a difference with other years, Semillon grapes we decided to pick them later than other years, because the maturity was achieved later than other years and also because we wanted to obtain a higher extract wine, with a full bodied texture gained with the concentration of the berry in the vine. But for that, we made a very short pruning in the winter resulting in low yielding of the vines. In the winery we vinified with a pre maceration in cold, and fermented in a range of 15 to 17 degrees Celsius, that is not a cold fermenting temperature, in order to allow the aromas of Semillon to express themselves. Today the wines are full ripe, with a complex quince, papaya and melon core, and in tastings is compared to our successful 1997 and far better than 2001 version.

Our last year's new star, Viognier, made another rich and elegant wine again. Protecting the berries from the extreme sunlight, and making a careful grape picking played a key role, as low yielding vines. The cold days in the spring and the cool nights in the summer, gave a special accent to the characteristic aromatic profile of Viognier grapes, increasing the fresh apricot scents, deep into a crisp fleshy wine. The winemaking skilled to preserve those aromas and to craft a unique blending wine.

Report in Red Wines

Cabernet Sauvignon grapes had a very different behavior, depending on the origin. The fruit coming from San Carlos Estate was clearly more firm, with dark colored berries and higher acidity levels, rich fruit, round and firm tannins, producing well structured wines, with a good aging potential by themselves. La Capilla Estate Cabernet Sauvignon was different: Always maturing earlier than in San Carlos, with higher alcohol but soft structures, giving mild creamy wines, but lean in texture. Finally, the first grapes collected from El Olivar Estate, gave only a discrete production, because of being the first crop for that land; so, we expect next vintage to express the real potential of this grapes. The resulting wines have turned to give us the best from San Carlos Estate in the last two vintages: that is the conclusion of the tastings. This year gave us full colored wines, with elegant noses and good bound structures; nevertheless, they need to evolve to be perceived with full complexity by September, that is our classical month to evaluate in depth the red wines. We have rediscovered the San Carlos Estate vineyards in our blocks 16 to 18, with a non irrigation policy for them, with extraordinary results. We actually apply that policy in blocks 33 and 34, two of the oldest vine blocks (60 year old vines), and some of the 2001 wines going to Special Selection Cabernet will come out of that work!. We are now, at this time of the year blending the wines for varietal label and entering wine in the barrels for the reserve and higher end wines.

Merlot grapes were very good this year 2002. The viticulture was important, too. Though, most significant was our approach to the winemaking. We wanted to extreme the soft texture of the wine, to what we took care in harvesting carefully by hand, leaving the skins intact. Only a small proportion was collected by machine. The tannins were gentle, lush and gave characteristic flavour profiles, that resemble plums and cassis. The wines are now being racked, and during the winter will receive a fining treatment. The reserve quality grapes will go into the barrels, after the final tasting by the end of June.

Our most well known grape is undoubtedly Malbec. In general, there were no surprises in terms of grape quality, from the different company's estates. We made our best wines out of block 4: These 80 year old vines give us extraordinary fruit, and from here we have made the Special Selection and Viu 1 wines. Also, from blocks 5 and 6 were the second best wines, independent of the vilification techniques applied to the grapes. The only surprise, and a good one, where the first Malbec grapes from El Olivar, that had good depth and a racy aroma profile, encouraging us to keep pushing those grapes in the future. Today El Olivar grapes are still a few, but in the future we will have more of it. The wines are being transported to the barrels and made blends in this time of the year.

Though not sure yet, this might be a Carmenere year. The grapes had a deep colored skin, from where we extracted the fleshy tannins of the variety, and all its spicy aromas. The wines are rich, soft and are being racked in this time of the year to ensure the clear nose, before fining treatment. A well controlled canopy management finally meant entire, luscious wines.

Finally, some words about other red varieties, where we have some interesting blending components available. Syrah gave bold, interesting wines from where to pick to add some spice in final blends. The same happens to our first Cabernet Franc, that gave a very personal nose profile, that is about to show us a new perspective of its use after some months in the barrels. Sangiovese is also a part of the blending equation, with its characteristic maraschino and rose petal aromas; and we made a very interesting wine of this cepage.

Leonardo Contreras
Chief Oenologist
Viu Manent