

Introduction

The 2015 vintage season will be remembered as a rather strange one. It began with frosts, primarily in the mountainous zones and some coastal sectors, which resulted in significant losses of up to 50–60% of production in some areas. Most of the sectors that were not affected by frosts last season were affected this year.

Although budbreak began one to three weeks earlier, depending on the zone, shoot growth was actually slower due to the low temperatures observed through mid-October. The weather later turned hot, and the months of January, February, March, and even April had high daytime temperatures with very cold nights, with the lowest average minimum temperatures in 11 years. As a result, the harvests for both whites and reds were earlier than usual very concentrated in time.

Being able to read the weather was key during this vintage, and picking early allowed us to obtain fresher wines with intense colors and lively palates.

The white wines are more complex than intense on the nose, and the palates are fresh with great volume. The red wines present tremendous color and structure, and despite the heat, they are fresh and fruity with outstanding palates.

	Average High T°	Average Low T°	Average T°	Degree Days	Accumulated Degree Days	Precipitation
May-14	-	-	-	0	0	128
Jun-14	13.7	2.6	8.2	0	0	217
Jul-14	18.6	2.8	8.3	0	0	50
Aug-14	16.5	4.3	10.5	0	0	105
Sep-14	17.6	6.6	12.2	67.1	67.1	79
Oct-14	24.5	7.1	15.8	179.4	246.5	0
Nov-14	27.7	6.3	16.5	210.2	456.7	26
Dec-14	29.4	8	18.7	271.7	728.4	13
Jan-15	33.5	8.5	21	341.2	1069.6	0
Feb-15	31.8	8.5	20.4	290.6	1360.2	0
Mar-15	32	8.6	20.2	317.7	1677.9	0
Apr-15	26.5	4.2	19.4	281.2	1959.1	5
May-15	22	2.7	12.3	35.9	1995	10

Note: Only the first 15 days of May are considered.



Night Harvest / Beginning vintage. February 19, 22:45 Sauvignon Blanc.



Old Malbec's grapevines

San Carlos de Cunaco Vineyard

It is very important to mention that we began the season with a “full tank” due to the winter rain, which continued to fall sporadically in August, September, November, and December, for a total of 623 mm, which is relatively normal for the zone, but that had not been observed in Colchagua since 2008. Furthermore, significant accumulation of snow in the mountains supplied the rivers with sufficient water for the fields and vineyards throughout the season.

Budbreak was extraordinarily even and took place a week earlier than in a normal year, although later growth was slower due to the low temperatures during the following months. The season was quite windy, but unlike the previous year, the wind blew from the Andes, which made it partially responsible for the low minimum temperatures throughout the valley.

Following budbreak, it was quite odd that we did not have an outbreak of “spring fever,” in which the leaves turn yellow due to the cold, damp soil, because all of the factors that trigger this seasonal deficiency were clearly present. Budbreak as well as bunch and berry size were all very even, and, in fact, I do not remember ever having seen such perfect Malbec clusters as we had this year—all of the berries were the same size and there was practically no shatter at all.

The harvest began with Sauvignon Blanc on February 19, Chardonnay on February 24, Viognier on the 26th, and early Malbec for Rosé on the 27th. The whites in general present less aromatic intensity when compared to other years, but they are still quite complex and have greater volume on the palate. With respect to the red varieties, we picked the old-vine Malbec on March 14 to have of a percentage of the blend with greater tension, freshness, and acidity. The Cabernet Sauvignon harvest began on March 27, Merlot on April 13, and we finished harvesting on April 25.

This year we picked the old-vine Malbec according to soil maps for the first time, and the results were very auspicious due to the different characteristics expressed by the different lots. This enabled us to work the blends with a higher range of possibilities than we had in the past.

Unlike in previous years, the first grapes picked were the highest quality due to the heat this year and the early disappearance of all of the green notes in the berries, which allowed us to maintain a very good level of total acidity, low sugar, and sufficiently ripe grapes.

So far the reds have character and are fresh, intense, and very well balanced, and the high qualities are truly very good. I think that this vintage, like last year's, is very good for both the Malbec and the Cabernet Sauvignon from San Carlos.



Cabernet Sauvignon, 25 years vineyards.



Dry cover crop vineyard.



Cabernet Sauvignon row.

La Capilla Vineyard

As in most of the valley, budbreak was very even, as was fruit set and veraison. The leaves remained evenly green right up to harvest, even in the Carmenere. The grapes, on the other hand, showed significant difference in ripening, primarily due to the variability in the soils and depths at La Capilla. Therefore a differentiated harvest according the polygonal scheme was key to achieving the best expression of the characteristics of each sector.

Harvest began on March 26 with the Cabernet Sauvignon polygon in the shallowest sector of the vineyard, which ripens first. We continued picking the other polygons approximately a week apart, and ended with Cabernet on April 23. We picked the Carmenere on April 28–30. Unlike in past years, the vines maintained their green leaves through harvest due to the absence of frosts and the good natural fertility of the soil, thanks to the vineyard management in recent years, which has allowed us to obtain healthier grapes from more active vines.

Both the Cabernet Sauvignon and the Carmenere are fresh and have grip, great structure and typicity, and express the characteristics of their place of origin very well.

It is important to mention that although we believed that this year's heat would lead to high potential alcohol levels in both the Cabernet Sauvignon and the Carmenere, in the end, however, they went in the opposite direction. The different lots of Cabernet Sauvignon for the Single Vineyard line are at 12.2% and 13%, and the Carmenere for the Gran Reserva line and El Incidente range from 12.7% to 13.9%.

We attribute these low final alcohol levels to the early harvest, but it is also possible that the high temperatures produced a blocking effect in the plants during which the leaves' stomata close and prevent the sugar levels in the berries to continue to rise.

On the other hand, the temperature records for the months prior to harvest show very low minimum temperatures, including an average of 3° to 4° lower than in a normal year. This, along with the very high maximum temperatures that exceeded 30°C accelerated phenolic ripening, allowing us to reach harvest with very ripe grapes with low sugar levels.

	Average daily temperature variation per month (°C)	Peak daily temperature variation per month (°C)
Ene-15	25	30.6
Feb-15	23.4	30.5
Mar-15	23.5	28.5

Daily temperature variation: the difference between the high and low temperatures of a single day.



"Praying Mantis" on Mourvedre grapes.

El Olivar Vineyard

The combination of El Olivar's geological origins, the bedrock close to the surface, and the winter and spring rains was important for vineyard development because water accumulated in the rock and created a very important water reserve for the following months. The 568 mm of rainfall was well distributed throughout the season, and even occurred in November and December, which allowed for the recuperation of moisture in the upper centimeters of the soil. This pushed back the need to irrigate and enabled greater natural development of the plants. Furthermore, the vineyards planted on rock or shallower soils (rock at 40–50 cm) produced bunches with very small berries.

We began the harvest with Syrah for the Single Vineyard line March 11–13, followed by Malbec on March 19, Grenache on March 20, Petit Verdot on March 24, Mourvedre on April 9, and Carmenere on April 24, and brought the season to a close with the last block of Carmenere on April 29.

Overall the wines are complex and have considerable character, color, tension, structure, and balance. I think this is a great year for Syrah, especially that grown on hillsides, and for the Carmenere for the Secreto line, which is much fresher and more vibrant and expressive of its place of origin than in previous years, primarily due, in my opinion, to the earlier harvest.

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