

Introduction

The 2016 vintage will be remembered as a complicated one due to the atypical weather conditions and the rains that fell at the end of harvest.

The season was affected by the El Niño phenomenon, which intensified in late winter and early spring 2015 and caused late rains, primarily concentrated in the months of July, August, September, and October.

This led us to expect a harvest with normal yields, but the high humidity and low temperatures throughout most of the spring affected fruit set and produced looser and lighter bunches. These conditions resulted in a 12.8% decrease in yield in red varieties at Viu Manent, but did not produce any major variation in the production of white varieties. Fortunately for us, the increased incidences of oidium (powdery mildew) and botrytis observed on a national scale did not affect our vineyards.

Although early summer was cooler than usual, the weather became very hot in late January and even brought heat waves during February, making it one of the hottest in recent years. The month of March, however, was marked by cloudy days and unusually low temperatures, which delayed ripening and finally resulted in harvests taking place 10 days later than usual.

We had two major rains in April (on 14–16 and again on 23–25), accompanied by high temperatures. This increased the threat of fungus and forced us to accelerate the harvest to bring in the grapes as quickly as possible to prevent any negative effects on the wines.

In broad terms, we can speak of three general moments of the harvest:

- Grapes harvested prior to the rain: healthy grapes and wines with tremendous color, aromatic intensity, very good acidity, and moderate alcohol levels. During this stage we primarily harvested the vineyards planted on hillsides or sectors with rolling hills and low yields. Although we will have to wait to make the final evaluation, the quality now appears to be fairly high.
- Grapes harvested between the rains: fruit from the hills and flatter areas that was not harvested prior to the first rain, gentle hills, and flat lands. The wines are correct with a bit of dilution, depending on the variety, but generally of medium and good quality.

- Grapes harvested after the two April rains: the quality of the fruit was affected, with the exception of the Carmenere, which withstood the rain well. At this point it was primarily Carmenere that was harvested, along with the remainder of other varieties that had not been brought in earlier. The quality of the wines will be more complicated, with the exception of vineyards that were very well managed with groups that resisted the rain, followed by proper management in the winery.

The good news for consumers is that the 2016 reds will have lower alcohol levels with good acidity and balance that are very different from the 14% alcohol levels we are used to in Chile, and they will be better food wines.



San Carlos de Cunaco

Because of rainfall late in the spring, the plants got off to a strong start in their vegetative development, which ultimately delayed the green management to compensate for the greater vigor. Debudding, enreja, shoot trimming, and green harvesting all took place an average of 10–15 days later than usual. Unlike in other years, the Chardonnay harvest began on February 29, primarily because it presented very low yields, which made up for the overall delay in ripening. We harvested the Malbec for the Reserva line's Rosé on March 3 and 4, followed by the Sauvignon Blanc for the Reserva line on March 6, approximately two weeks later than normal. Overall, I believe that this is a good year for these three wines, which present intense and fruity aromas with alcohol levels similar to those of prior years, but with much better balance and freshness on the palate.

We began picking the Viognier on March 10, which resulted in a wine with interesting quality for the Secreto line.

We began picking the red varieties on March 30 with the Malbec. We were particularly concerned about harvesting before the first rainfall because this variety absorbs water very quickly, which can dilute and damage the grapes by causing them to swell. The Malbec was the variety most affected during fruit set, and its yields were reduced by 41%.

The Merlot was picked on April 6, and the Cabernet Sauvignon harvest began on April 12.

The red wines to date have been very fresh and balanced with good aromatic intensity.

La Capilla

We only have Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenere in this vineyard. The phenological stages were delayed from the beginning of the season, and by the ripening period it was 7–10 days late, which became even later due to the numerous foggy days and high humidity during the month of March, comparable to conditions normally seen in colder zones, such as Casablanca.

As in past years, the Cabernet Sauvignon was harvested by polygons, which was vitally important this year due to the uneven and delayed ripening. Managing the harvest in this way allowed us to select grapes from the sectors with shallower soils, which ripen earlier and leave plants or rows planted on deeper soils to be picked later as they ripen. The first Cabernet grapes from La Capilla reached the winery on April 9, 15 days later than the previous year.

The Carmenere from La Capilla usually ripens during the last week of April, and this year was no exception. We had to run the risk of rain, which did fall, although the grapes were well protected with organic products to prevent fungal attacks. Although the vineyard tolerated the rain well, we will not make a 2016 vintage of El Incidente because we do not have the extraordinary quality we need for that wine. I believe that we have an average year with good results for the rest of the wines from this vineyard—Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon and Gran Reserva Carmenere.

The wines are good, fresh, and very well balanced with very good acidity and alcohol levels of approximately 13%.

El Olivar

Planting on slopes with soils of geological origin was determinant for the performance of the different vineyards planted on the El Olivar property.

The cold autumn encouraged slower ripening, primarily in all of the vineyards planted on slopes and on soils dominated by bedrock.

Like the rest of the Viu Manent vineyards, it was very important to harvest in polygons in order to bring in the grapes at their ideal level of ripeness, while leaving behind plants or entire sectors with grapes that needed more time to ripen.

We began the harvest with Syrah for the Single Vineyard line from a steeper hillside in the highest sector of the property on March 21, exactly 10 days later than in 2015.

We continued with the piedmont Malbec for the Secreto line on March 28, the Tannat on March 29, Petit Verdot (on a 30% slope) on March 31, Garnacha on April 8, Monastrell on April 20, and ended with Carmenere on April 25 and 26.

It is important to point out that good water management in the agricultural area enabled us to achieve early ripening in all of the varieties, although obviously without considering the Carmenere, which genetically ripens late.

I believe that this is a very good year for the Petit Verdot, which we generally use in the high-end Viu 1 and El Incidente blends, as well as in the Malbec for the Secreto line and the Syrah. It is interesting to mention the Tannat's qualitative evolution in recent years. We have been using it in blends, but it presents tremendous qualitative potential for producing a special Tannat-based wine in the near future.

Overall the wines present very good color and are aromatically intense, concentrated, pleasing, and very fresh and fine.

Here as in most of Chile, if there was a single variety that was most affected, it was Carmenere, which had to withstand the rain prior to harvest. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the entire team, we were able to harvest it quickly and avoid the fungal problems that appeared in most of the country.



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