

# Harvest Report 2012

## Introduction

Unlike the two previous harvests, 2012 will be remembered as dry and very hot. While spring temperatures rose gradually without extremes of heat or cold, January displayed significant increases in temperatures that persisted through February and March, and even into April. This was compounded by some problems related to water shortages in a few of Chile's winegrowing valleys and led to harvests that were two or three weeks early. It is important to note that March was the warmest month of the entire season.

I think it was a very challenging harvest, where experience, organization, attention to detail, and logistics all played key roles in obtaining interesting qualities in the wines produced.

## 2011–2010 Growing Season

In contrast to the 2011 and 2010 seasons, temperatures were good this spring and relative humidity was lower, which encouraged good fruit set. This was due to the La Niña phenomenon, characterized by cooler than normal ocean temperatures (1°–2°C lower) over an extensive area along the South American coast. This led to high pressure zones off the coast of North and Central Chile—better known as the Pacific Anticyclone—which increased in intensity and extended further south than usual, preventing weather fronts from moving inland and hindering the development of precipitation-bearing clouds in Chile's central and southern zones.

Precipitation this season was 371 mm at the San Carlos estate and 320 mm at the El Olivar estate, entirely concentrated in June, July, and August 2011. It is worth noting that precipitation in Colchagua is normally around 600 mm.

Unlike previous years, the first cottony buds appeared in El Olivar on the Malbec, Petit Verdot, and Tempranillo varieties on September 5, 8 and 9, respectively, and budbreak occurred 5 to 7 days later, more quickly than in past years mainly due to the better temperatures and humidity at that time. At the San Carlos Estate budbreak was one week later than normal, on average, and at La Capilla it occurred normally, except for the Carmenere, which usually sees budbreak a week before the Cabernet Sauvignon, but this year occurred a couple of days later.

In August mean temperatures began to rise gradually and, remarkably, continued to rise through February and March. In January the mean

monthly temperature at the San Carlos Estate was 20.38°C, in February, 20.61°, and in March it was 21.65°, making it the hottest month of the year. Coupled with the shortage of water, this led to a harvest that was approximately 10 to 15 days earlier than in a normal year. There were also some problems with dehydration of the grapes in some cases, as on the one hand there was insufficient water for irrigation, and on the other, the soil did not retain moisture effectively, especially in the riverbed vineyards and those planted on sandy soil. Due to the favorable climatic conditions, however, yields increased by 10 to 15%.

## **Whites**

Thanks to the age and balance of the Sauvignon Blanc vines, which grow beside the winery in San Carlos, these grapes were not only harvested slightly earlier than in recent years, but also yielded very interesting results.

We began the harvest on the night of Sunday xxx [mm1] 19, and finished on Thursday xxx 23. We also used grapes from Casablanca (9–10%) to increase aromatic intensity and contribute somewhat riper fruit notes in the final blend because we were able to harvest a little later without sacrificing too much acidity. The final result was a wine that is refreshing, fruity, and very easy to drink, with 12.7% alcohol.

The grapes used for the Secreto Sauvignon were picked March 15–17 (3 weeks earlier than last year) in the vineyard located next to the town of Casablanca, and on March 28 and April 5 (10 days earlier than last year) on the hillside and on the plain, respectively, in the Las Dichas vineyard, 11 kilometers from the sea.

I do not believe this will be a great year for the Casablanca Sauvignon Blancs in general because of the high temperatures recorded during the period leading up to the harvest, but this Secreto Sauvignon is still quite interesting, with a fine, mineral nose and a mineral-laden, well-balanced palate that shows good volume.

After the Sauvignon Blanc, we continued with the Chardonnay at the San Carlos Estate on March 6 and harvested an average of 10–15 days earlier than normal. Unlike previous years, we harvested with the intention of obtaining a more refreshing Chardonnay. We therefore prevented the berries from being exposed to the sun and decreased the intensity of the battonage, which increases the wine's creaminess and volume but also reduces its freshness.

Harvesting of the Viognier began on March 12, almost 3 weeks earlier than in a normal year. This variety makes up approximately 30% of the final blend to heighten its freshness. The rest of the grapes were picked a week later. Although the blend is not yet made, the different

components display interesting and very distinct characteristics, which promises a positive ending to the story.

Later, in the last week of March and 3 weeks earlier than normal, we harvested the Chardonnay from Casablanca, which is used for our Gran Reserva Chardonnay. As with the Estate Collection Reserva line, the idea was to harvest slightly early and at the same time avoid exposing the clusters to the sun for a more refreshing style with fewer ripe notes of honey and melon. For the same reason, approximately 40% was fermented in stainless steel tanks, where it is being held to maintain freshness and contribute this quality to the final blend. The remaining 60% was fermented in French oak barrels (5% new) to lend additional complexity and lushness in the final blend. Following the same philosophy as the Estate Collection line, battonage was limited to highlight the wine's freshness rather than its volume and weight. For the same reason, we did not allow any of the lots to undergo malolactic fermentation this year.

As always, the last white and final variety to be harvested (June 4–5) was the Semillón, which grows in a vineyard that is more than 50 years old on the San Carlos Estate. Although the year was warm and dry, the natural source of botrytis in the block was very high, and thanks to the fog and dew that occurred in the final days of April, botrytis spread very quickly. I think we harvested with close to 100% infection this year, and the wine is very interesting, with a lot of character and a refreshing acidity. The only thing left to do now is to wait while it evolves in the old barrels in which it is presently stored.

## **Reds.**

I believe that the Viu Manent agricultural team, led by Agricultural Manager Miguel Mujica, made the right decision when they began irrigating early and filling ponds to prepare for the deficit in winter precipitation. It was also very important to keep the yields a bit higher than normal this year, privileging the balance of the plant over a given number of kilos per hectare. This larger—but not excessive—yield partly compensated for the excess heat and enabled the grapes to ripen more gradually and also allowed us to obtain well-balanced wines with good acidity, because they were also harvested early.

Another key point was the vitality and good health of the plants, given that they are well managed and we have spent years studying them to understand them better. Another factor was that the Viu Manent soils, especially at the San Carlos estate, retain water very well, which was also important this year because they did an excellent job of naturally distributing the supply of water to the plant, especially during the period prior to harvest.

The concentration of extractable tannins was also very high due to the year's conditions, and therefore extractions in the winery were very gentle, and in some cases extremely so with only 3 or 4 short pumpovers performed over the entire course of the vinification process, and then only to provide the yeasts with a bit of oxygen so they could do their work and finish the fermentation, rather than for purposes of extraction.

We began the red grape harvest with Pinot Noir from the Casablanca Valley for our Secreto Pinot. We picked one of the vineyards on March 17 and 19 and the other on March 25—10 and 15 days earlier than normal, respectively. This year we continued increasing the percentage of wine fermented with native yeasts with very good results, especially with respect to the character and acidity of the wine. Although the different lots have good fruit and volume, the high temperatures accelerated ripening in the final period, which partially decreased the natural acidity and produced a riper style than we would have preferred for this 2012 Pinot. That said, and considering it was a hot year, we could not have expected anything else because aside from expressing the characteristics of its origin, wine should also express the characteristics of the year.

At the same time we were picking the Pinot, we began harvesting Merlot in Colchagua for the Estate Collection Reserva line (March 17, approximately 15 days earlier than in a normal year). No dehydration problems were observed, primarily because it is planted on deep soils with good moisture retention and because we picked early. The wine is very well balanced and shows floral notes and red fruit on the nose along with a subtle spicy touch of black pepper. Once again this wine is pleasing and easy to drink.

The following week (March 27) we began harvesting the different polygons of Syrah for the Single Vineyard line. We began with all of the shallower sectors—those with approximately 70–80 cm of soil over fractured bedrock, where 5–8% of the vine roots are concentrated today. These sectors ripen before the rest and it is extremely important to harvest them at the right moment because the ripeness evolves very quickly and the fruit can go from fresh to ripe very quickly with the corresponding increase in sugar levels, which in turn increases the alcohol level in the finished wine. Six days later we continued with the “later” polygons—those with deeper roots. Those sectors are primarily ravines or wetter sectors where the moisture has already degraded the bedrock and there is more clay that mixes with the small unweathered rocks (volcanic fractures), which allows the plants to be more vigorous and therefore mature later.

As was the case in the previous year, the polygons are consistent and show differences and great character and good acidity, although when compared with 2011, the wines do show some evidence of it being a warmer year. Unlike previous years, however, and as I mentioned earlier, this year began with yields that were 10–15% greater, which compensated for the higher temperatures and maintained the sugar-acidity balance in the grapes.

We also began harvesting the Syrah for the Secreto line on March 27. Just like the Single Vineyard Syrah, most of this Syrah comes from a hillside plantation, although the vines themselves are younger. The wine shows many thiols (varietal aromas) and is fresh, with good structure and character, which leads me to bet on its quality. The 2012 vintage will be the second in which the highest percentage of the Secreto blend comes from hillsides and to a lesser degree from the plain, which is clearly appreciated in the wine.

A couple days after we began picking the Syrah, April 2, we started to bring in the Malbec from the San Carlos de Cunaco estate, 10 days earlier than in a normal year. The first portion is usually picked with the Estate Collection in mind, but the vines are now eight years old and beginning to show very interesting aspects, such as very elegant fruit and a silky structure. This makes it attractive as a component of the Gran Reserva Malbec, which primarily comes from older vines on the same property. This section was picked a week later to allow it to reach a bit more ripeness and structure in the wine.

We began harvesting the Malbec for the Single Vineyard line (blocks 5 and 6) on April 24 and for Viu1 (block 4) on April 30. In this case the harvest date varies less in comparison with a normal year because the vines are very old (averaging more than 80 years), very well balanced, and relatively homogenous at harvest time year after year, although, like the Syrah and other Malbecs, the 10% increase in yield counteracted the high temperatures and finally led to excellent quality grapes. This is added to the characteristics of the soil, which is extraordinarily porous, with tremendous root development, in which the clay has the ability to administer the delivery of water to the plant very well throughout the entire season because the clay is very expandable and does not crack.

I feel that the quality of the Malbec is spectacular this year—at least at Viu Manent. It has excellent fruit, considerable thiols and fresh fruit in several lots, which is difficult to find in warm vintages such as this one. With respect to the Cabernet Sauvignon, once again the best examples come from the La Capilla Estate. As was the case last year with the Syrah from El Olivar, this is the first time that we have made a separation in the vineyard following the polygon pattern, which means that the harvest was completely differentiated in accordance with the

different soil types, including those in the interior of the block. The results are very clear and although the wines have not yet completed their malolactic fermentation, they are already showing great potential. We finally harvested those blocks (1–4) between April 12 and 16, beginning with the shallowest soil polygons (60–70 cm), where the Cabernet ripens more quickly, although it is not necessarily of the greatest potential, and ending with the “late” polygons planted in sectors with deeper soils, which continues to be interesting due to the warm year.

We began picking the old-vine Cabernet (more than 50 years old) at the San Carlos estate on April 9—a week earlier than in a normal year. The qualities obtained in these Cabernets were relatively even, and the majority of the vineyard produced Reserva quality.

Unlike the Malbec, I think this is not a great year for Cabernet Sauvignon, which is too sensitive to the high temperatures, and even through we harvested relatively early, I think that it was still somewhat affected by the weather. It bears mention, however, that there are several lots that show very good quality, especially those from the La Capilla estate.

With respect to other red varieties, like last year, we are very impressed by the quality of the Grenache, Mourvèdre, and Tannat, as well as the Tempranillo planted at El Olivar that we incorporated this year. These are young vineyards (planted in 2005 and 2006), and we continue the special work we are doing with each of them to determine their potential. Once again we are very satisfied and have obtained even better qualities than we did last year, which confirms that Colchagua does indeed have great potential for these varieties, which express themselves very well in the southern Rhone Valley in France (especially Grenache and Mourvèdre).

As always, the last red variety harvested at Viu Manent is the Carmenere, which we began picking on April 27 and finished in mid-May. Once again the most interesting Carmeneres come from the La Capilla property, where we picked according to the same method as the Cabernet Sauvignon, by following the polygons made by Pedro Parra, our terroir consultant. These included some sectors with shallower soils, others that are semi-deep and low in vigor, and still others that are deeper and fertile, etc. As has been the case in recent years, block 20 stands out above the rest, although this year, thanks to the polygons, we harvested the neighboring block 21 differentially and obtained tremendous quality that complemented block 20, which may make it an interesting component to include in the El Incidente blend. In general the polygons that did the best were the sectors that had deeper rather than shallower soils.

The other Carmenere that did very well this year, and that—unlike last

year—delivered relatively normal (and not excessively low) yields, was the Carmenere from the El Olivar estate. Once again the grapes grown on hillsides produced concentrated, thin, and vertical wines, and the grafted vines in the flatter sector (third year) consistently demonstrated concentration and considerable fruit. Once again the two were the base of the 2012 Secreto Carmenere.

In closing, and as I commented in last year's report, we have continued our terroir study at our different properties, which has allowed us to understand the differences in quality that we sometimes found in the same block. This has helped us differentiate viticultural management in order to improve all of the sectors that are lower in quality while also using a "skimming" technique for harvesting the polygons to obtain the best of each sector and ultimately improve the final quality of our wines. Salud con Vinos Viu!

**Patricio Celedón**

Chief Winemaker

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