

La Seca, September 19th 2014

AB Your harvest has already finished. What sort of year has 2014 been?

Didier Belondrade It's been a warm vintage with high ripeness levels. That's why we started early -on September 5th. We usually begin the harvest later.



AB You don't often follow the rest of Rueda with your picking dates. Sometimes you're the first, sometimes the last. What happened this time?

Didier Belondrade I think we were among the first. But most Rueda wineries, perhaps all of them, harvest by machine and do it in one go. We only pick our plots when each is ripe. We have different soils with different exposures, and so even if we start before the rest we can sometimes be the last to finish.

AB You often distinguish between hot, Continental years and cooler more "Atlantic" years. 2014 appears to belong in the former category?

Didier Belondrade Back in August, when we were sampling grapes, ripeness levels were already high. So we decided to pick quite early. Amazingly, acidity was high, often around 9, and the pH was around 3.3.

AB Is it unusual to have this level of acidity?

Didier Belondrade It's a bonus when the wines are very ripe to have high natural acidity. I'm very happy about that.

AB Do you have an explanation as to how you managed to preserve this acidity and at the same time enhance ripening?

Didier Belondrade Summer temperatures were very high, and as usual we did some green harvesting. But instead of de-leafing and trimming the tops of the shoots, we decided to let vine vegetation grow. The vines looked a bit of a mess, but the leaves provided shade for the fruit and protected it from sunburn. This may well be the reason why acidity levels were high.

AB I noticed that even now your vines are healthy and green, while other vineyards have become yellow or even brown at the bottom of the vine canopy.

Didier Belontrade Because those vines were over-exposed to the heat, and the gravelly soil close to the base of the canopy reflected the heat and exacerbated the problem.

AB I suppose that if you harvest by hand, like you do, you don't have to worry about shoots growing long and hanging down...

Didier Belontrade You can't do that if you want to machine harvest. As we pick entirely by hand it wasn't a problem. And the fruit was perfectly healthy. In wetter years we certainly wouldn't have risked it. We'd have worried about disease or rot. It was Marta who decided to do it this way this year, and it proved to be an inspired decision.

AB With these high ripeness levels, will alcohol be too high?

Didier Belontrade With very ripe grapes, inevitably alcohol is going to be quite high. Generally in Rueda, alcohol in 2014 will be a bit higher. Instead of 12.5, wines will be at 13. Here at Belontrade we'll be between 13 and 14, which is what we have every vintage.

AB But nearer 14 than 13 perhaps?

Didier Belontrade Yes, but the important thing for me is not the degree of alcohol but the balance in the wine overall, and with that wonderful acidity we have that balance. Over the years we've had vintages which were rich in alcohol, like the 1996, 1999, 2002, 2006, 2009 and 2012, one vintage in three more or less. Nobody has complained about them. In fact, they're very attractive wines. They're what I call "flattering" wines and are many people's favourites.

AB You've said before that, for your personal taste, you prefer the elegance of the wines made in cooler years.

Didier Belontrade That's right. I think that 2014 will most probably be a more "flattering" vintage, like those I just mentioned. However, we need to wait and see how the fermentations go and the behaviour of the yeasts. Our fermentations are spontaneous and with our own indigenous yeasts, and they are what determine the final alcoholic degree.

AB High acidity is not always present in the ripe years. Could the acidity of 2014 bring a touch of Atlantic to a Continental-style vintage?

Didier Belondrade It could well do that. In any case, this is an atypical vintage. I don't know for sure yet whether it will or won't be in the category of my favourite Belondrade vintages. But I'm confident that it will be an excellent vintage.

AB In terms of volume, is it a normal year?

Didier Belondrade Yes, it is. And the quality is good right across the vineyard. So we have plenty of options for the selection of lots for both Belondrade and Apolonia. We've got a strong hand to play.