

La Seca, September 9th September 2015

AB The 2015 harvest is just finishing. How has it gone?

Didier Belontrade Very smoothly. Some vintages can be tricky. This was completely stress-free. The only frustration was the small size of the crop.

AB What is the yield?

Didier Belontrade 4,400 kilos per hectare.

AB What would you normally expect to produce?

Didier Belontrade Last year, which was pretty normal, we had 5,800 kilos per hectare.

AB A big drop in volume then...

Didier Belontrade Good job that the grapes were impeccably healthy, and we were able to keep everything. Last year we had to throw out grapes that had been *passerillés*. Fortunately there was no need for that this year. You can see for yourself at the sorting table, there's absolutely nothing to discard.

AB How good is the quality?

Didier Belontrade It's very high. Great acidities. It's a textbook vintage. And it's beautifully ripe.

AB Is it the same story for the whole of the Rueda appellation?

Didier Belontrade Yes, I believe so. At least, for unirrigated vineyards.

AB Was 2015 an early harvest at Belontrade?



Didier Belontrade We began on 31st August and were among the first three wineries to pick the Verdejo. I didn't want alcoholic degrees to get too high, and by then the acidities were great. The pHs were around 3.30, 3.31 and 3.32. Acidities were 7.8 to 7.5. The parameters were perfect. It was right to pick early.

AB How long has the harvest lasted?

Didier Belontrade As you know, we pick by hand gradually, according to plot and terroir. This year it has lasted 9 days. We're finishing now.

AB How many pickers did you have this year?

Didier Belontrade 30.

AB Another fine year at Belontrade then. If there is a problem for you, it's that you need more wine for your markets. Demand for Belontrade has been outstripping supply over recent years. The simplest solution for you would be to buy-in grapes, wouldn't it?

Didier Belontrade That's not my philosophy and never will be. We are a single estate, which means that we make wine only from the grapes produced in our own vineyard. I'm not going to change that.

AB What's the solution then?

Didier Belontrade The solution is to buy more vineyards. I'm currently looking into purchasing 6 maybe 8 hectares very close to our winery. We'd replant the vines there, so it's not an immediate solution, but it's a good one for the medium and long-term.

AB Your current annual production is around 80,000 bottles isn't it?

Didier Belontrade 80,000 bottles of Belontrade, plus 50,000 of Quinta Apolonia. In all it's about 140,000 bottles.

AB How much more could you produce, given the capacity of your cellars?

Didier Belontrade With the new cellars, I could fit in another one hundred 300-litre barrels, which would increase production by up to 50,000 bottles.

AB It's hugely to your credit that you have produced such large quantities of high quality white wine fermented in barrel. It's rare!

Didier Belondrade In Rueda, we are the only ones doing that in such large quantities. We're also still working by hand as artisans.

AB Do you think that an extra 50,000 bottles would be enough to satisfy demand over the long term?

Didier Belondrade There are two reasons for increasing the vineyard surface area: one is to have more supply for our established clients, as I have just said; but there's another reason which is important to me, and that is to have more choice and be able to open new markets. My son, Jean, has found new distributors in such places as Thailand and Colombia. These aren't huge markets and don't require volume, but I would like to develop these small markets. There are some exciting opportunities on the export market.

AB Would you perhaps consider creating new brands?

Didier Belondrade That's a possibility. But first of all, I would like to continue developing Quinta Apolonia, and some extra volume would enable this. The label has recently been changed to the same format as the Belondrade label, and its name is now Belondrade Quinta Apolonia. This has helped the distribution of Apolonia, especially as an alternative to Belondrade when there's no more stock.

AB Would you ever be tempted to make a very small quantity of a limited release wine, a "*Seleccion Didier Belondrade*" for example.

Didier Belondrade That has never been my philosophy. In this respect, I follow the Bordeaux tradition of making a First Wine, which is the main wine and the top premium quality. I really don't want that philosophy to change at Belondrade, and I'm sure that Jean is with me on this. If we did go down that road, I think Belondrade would lose its soul.

AB Jean is gradually becoming a full member of the Belondrade team, working in far-off markets and sparing you some of those long and tiring trips. As he takes over responsibility for the rest of the markets, perhaps you will have more time on your hands to start new projects. What would you like to do in the future?

Didier Belondrade I'm very happy to stay at the helm at Belondrade, and I will continue to do so. However, I'm also quite attracted to the idea of making wine in another white wine region.

AB In Spain?

Didier Belondrade **Yes, maybe in Galicia. In Ribeiro or Ribeira Sacra, for example.**