

**Didier Belondrade brings in a perfect crop that promises an elegant, fresh 2012**



*It took time for all his plots to reach perfect ripeness, but with dry conditions and healthy grapes Didier Belondrade brought in excellent raw material at lower than average alcohol levels to inaugurate his new vinification cellar in the best possible way.*

Rueda, October 25, 2012

**AB** *Sometimes at Belondrade you harvest late to ensure complete and optimal ripeness; last year you were one of the first to pick, to ensure freshness and elegance in the wine. What was the decision for the 2012 harvest?*

**Didier Belondrade** The decision is always made on a plot by plot basis. We have a range of small parcels planted in different terroirs where optimal ripeness is sometimes reached at different times. This was the case in 2012. In the lead-up to the 2012 harvest, I actually thought we'd be picking by September 5, 6 or 7. In the end we only started on September 17.

**AB** *Which is a relatively early start...*

**Didier Belondrade** It's similar to 2011. The interesting fact is that we only finished on 4 October. That's three weeks of harvesting, which is a long period for just 150,000kg or so of grapes.

**AB** *What made you delay the picking?*

**Didier Belondrade** We miscalculated the ripening. I think the drought conditions that had been with us all year were to blame. Ripening had slowed down.

*AB* ***Were the vines stressed?***

Didier Belondrade **Not particularly. We didn't have a hot summer. There were no outward signs of stress, and in any case the way we grow our vines helps them to avoid any stress. It was simply because the weather had been dry for a long time, and the ripening process was more laborious than I had expected.**

*AB* ***That also explains why it took 3 weeks to get all the plots ripe.***

Didier Belondrade **Yes, and I'm glad we were patient because the result is really excellent. One advantage of this long drought was that the fruit was in perfect health. There was virtually nothing to discard at the sorting table. We even ended up producing between 5 and 7% more grapes than last year.**



*AB* ***It was an easy year for organic growers then...***

Didier Belondrade **We're now in our third year of conversion to organic viticulture. Next year we'll get certification. If it's like that every year we'll have no worries at all.**

*AB* ***What in fact was your yield in 2012?***

Didier Belondrade **Around 32hl/ha, which is just over a normal yield for us.**

*AB* ***That's very small for Rueda!***

Didier Belondrade            **It's about half what's produced by most Rueda wineries. An interesting fact this year is that high-yielding vineyards in Rueda produced smaller than average crops this year, whereas we were actually a little bit up. I think that shows that we don't demand too much from our vines, and in tricky years like 2012 not only do our vines respond well, they even produce a little more.**

*AB    What were the results quality-wise in 2012?*

Didier Belondrade            **Again the results were a little unexpected. Last year, with similar harvesting dates, the wines were quite rich in alcohol. In 2012 however, the degrees are somewhat lower.**

*AB    Does that make much difference in the overall style of the wine?*

Didier Belondrade            **Well it reminds me of the 2000 vintage. I remember saying back then that it was less of a Spanish vintage and more of a French one. The acidities are excellent too which is another aspect that enhances that impression.**

*AB    What is the alcoholic degree in 2012?*

Didier Belondrade            **Around 13. It's usually 13.5 or more.**

*AB    You appear to be seeking finesse and elegance in your wines, rather than power and opulence, so that's very satisfying...*

Didier Belondrade            **I have sometimes made wines that are rich in alcohol, and this has never been a problem for me. The important thing is that the alcohol should be harmoniously integrated in the whole. It's all about balance.**

*AB    You're not deliberately seeking to make lower alcohol wines nowadays?*

Didier Belondrade            **No, look at some of Spain's great wines: Pingus, Roda, Abadia Retuerta...they're all high in alcohol, but when you drink them the high alcohol is practically undetectable. There are sometimes vintages in which the alcohol is lower, as in 2012, and the freshness and elegance come through very well.**

*AB* **You vinified it in your new cellar. Have you continued to scale down the proportion of new barrels?**

Didier Belondrade **In the last few years we've used an average of 25% new barrels. This year we're down to 20%.**

*AB* **You always insist this is not for economic reasons.**

Didier Belondrade **The new barrels we use are really top-of-the-range and I pay accordingly, so it's nothing to do with saving money. My aim is to fine-tune the proportion to make it fit perfectly the style of the wine of the year. Who knows, maybe I'll go back up to 25% next year?**



(Photo by Cesar Prados)

*AB* **It's a question of adapting to the raw material...**

Didier Belondrade **It's exactly that. We do the same thing in the vineyard, adapting our work to plots and terroirs. We take into account that our sandy terroirs produce more elegance in the wine while clay gives more power. Every factor is taken into account in each vintage.**

*AB* **This year you vinified for the first time in your new cellars in different atmospheric conditions...**

Didier Belondrade **Yes, the cellar is completely neutral with no unknown yeasts floating around in the atmosphere. We fermented using exclusively our own selection of yeasts. It will be interesting to see the results in the wine.**

*AB* **Did the fermentation go smoothly?**



*Andrew Black*  
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Didier Belondrade            **Incredibly well. Very fast and smooth. The fermentations went as quickly and as easily as they did when we used to add selected yeasts back in the old days.**

*AB    So all in all, the 2012 vintage has been very encouraging. Good ripeness in the vineyard, perfectly healthy, good volume –all coming from your own vines, a new cellar to vinify with your own selection of yeasts, and a potentially elegant fresh and balanced wine.*

Didier Belondrade            **That's it in a nutshell!**