

HARVEST

REPORT 2021

By Alistair Cooper MW

Harvest at Bodega Piedra Negra, Mendoza



CONDOR
SOUTH AMERICAN WINE SPECIALIST





Vineyards of Viña Requingua, Chile



Lee Evans

MD & Co-founder,
Condor Wines

Despite having to tackle a second harvest under Covid19 conditions, wineries have been almost unanimously positive about the 2021 vintage and according to Alistair Cooper MW the word he has heard repeatedly is 'vibrancy'.

Argentina and Chile both report a much 'cooler vintage' bringing a slower maturation; for the reds this has meant more complexity, lower alcohol and higher acidity. Both regions also reported significantly higher than normal levels of rain and, with the threat of botrytis, whites had to be picked early, which again resulted in lower alcohol and higher acidity. With its Atlantic maritime climate, Uruguay normally has very different conditions to its winemaking neighbours, but they too benefited from a variance in 2021 with some similar conditions to Chile and Argentina. The rains always come but a cooler than normal February slowed maturation and in the final month perfect dry conditions prevailed, ultimately we can expect great quality in the 2021 whites and reds.

Alistair Cooper MW again captures the experiences and expectations of our producers, I hope you enjoy learning more about this very promising harvest and I look forward to sharing some of the 2021 wines with you soon.



Alistair Cooper

Master of Wine

Alistair has nearly 20 years of experience in the industry living and working in the UK, Argentina and Chile. As a specialist on the wines of South America he writes for *JancisRobinson.com* and is a regular contributor to *Decanter*, but he has also written for many trade publications such as *Harpers* and *Drinks International*.

He is a regular judge at the Decanter World Wine Awards and is a panel chair for the IWSC, as well as President of South America's most prestigious wine competition, the Cata d'Or Wine Awards.



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ARGENTINA



Bodega Piedra Negra, Mendoza

As is often the case, there are definite similarities between Chile and Argentina when it comes to harvest 2021. However as always, there are also subtle but important differences. Comparing 2021 with 2020 in Argentina though is like chalk and cheese.



Malbec Vineyard, La Consulta, Karim Mussi Wines

Following the precociously hot vintage of 2020, this year can be summarized as a considerably cooler (but not homogenous) vintage with significantly higher rainfall and roughly 25% lower average degree days.

Spring frosts caused some concern in October, but minimal damage was recorded throughout Mendoza. Down in Patagonia, Bodega del Rio Elorza experienced some frost issues and yields were mildly impacted. Salta, in the north, escaped the spring frosts but Agustin Lanus Wines did report a small reduction in harvest due to hail early in the year.

Hail can be a major problem in Mendoza and has been known to devastate vineyards. Fortunately, this year passed with only mild instances being reported by Karim Mussi in December and January, and thus minimal impact on the vines.



“ WE CAN SUMMARIZE THE 2021 SEASON IN MANY WAYS. THE LESS OPTIMISTIC MAY USE A SINGLE WORD: RAIN! BUT THE OPTIMISTS LIKE US WILL PREFER TWO WORDS: EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY. ”

Karim Mussi, Karim Mussi Wines



“ THE DIFFERENCES IN WEATHER CONDITIONS PRODUCED WONDERFUL WINES. THE RED WINES ARE SHARP AND BRIGHTER WITH BETTER ACIDITY THAN THE LAST HARVEST AND GOOD AGING WILL INCREASE THE LIFE, JUICINESS AND FRESHNESS. ”

Alejandro Canovas, Falasco Wines

Whilst over in Chile the unprecedented rains fell in January, in Mendoza it was concentrated in February – where over 100mm of rainfall was reported by Bodega Piedra Negra. To put this into context, average annual rainfall over the past 10 years has been just 250mm! This rainfall did cause some problems for Familia Falasco due to the presence of botrytis in the vineyard which led to harvesting the whites a little earlier. However, they report that the white wines are looking wonderful - very fresh acidity but great volume and outstanding mouthfeel. Sometimes being forced to harvest a little earlier than desired can prove to be a blessing in disguise. Similar reports came from Piedra Negra where the Pinot Gris came in with 12% alcohol and a pH of 3.2 giving excellent natural acidity to the wines.

In Salta, there were similar reports from Lanus. High frequency, low intensity rains throughout January and February meant a quick harvest generating fresh, aromatic wines with more acid and lower alcohol levels.

When it comes to the red wines, reports are equally positive. Falasco are very pleased with their bright, juicy reds. Thibault Lepoutre at Piedra Negra concurs, describing his 2021 vintage for both red and white as “fresh and elegant.” Agustin Lanus goes even further, calling his vintage quality “outstanding.”

Excellent reports are also filtering back from Rio Elorza where the wines are showing notable vibrancy. This is a word that nearly all our producers are using when



Harvest at Bodega Los Harldos, Mendoza

describing the wines of 2021, which should suit our UK palate down to the ground. I am very much looking forward to tasting some of these fresh and chiselled wines from the 2021 vintage.

Covid 19 again caused issues for some producers – Rio Elorza lost two of their small team for 10 days after testing positive for Covid. This helped them keep in shape and removed the need for any trips to the gym! Falasco report that with all the necessary systems in place they were able to safely navigate the harvest without any Covid-related issues. Hopefully, next year things will be even easier for our producers.

“ AT EXTREME ALTITUDE 2021 WAS AN OUTSTANDING YEAR IN TERMS OF QUALITY, WITH VERY HIGH CONCENTRATION AND FANTASTIC COLOUR. ”



Agustín Lanús,
Agustín Lanús Wines



Harvest at altitude, Agustín Lanús Wines, Salta



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Harvest at Viña Requiringua, Curicó Valley, Chile

As I mentioned in last year's harvest report, Chile has experienced wildly varied vintage conditions over the past five years. Gone are the days of 'The New World' having homogenous and straightforward vintages - if they ever truly did! This means that producers must be able to adapt quickly. Personally, I think that this has only improved the wines being produced as each vintage offers different challenges and requires different solutions. Every year offers vital learning opportunities and experience grows. In fact, 2021 could not have been more different to 2020. The one exception was the lingering presence of Covid-19.

2021 was a cool vintage. When compared to 2020 it could even be described as very cool. Yet the temperatures recorded in 2021 were closer to the historic averages experienced in Chile. After a decade of drought, the wet winter of 2020 was a welcome relief for the country and especially for the viticulturists. Bouchon Family Wines reported a 50% increase on last year's winter rainfall at their Maule headquarters, whilst Hacienda Araucano in Colchagua happily reported the refilling of the water table and reservoirs. At Araucano they had a slight issue with frosts in October that led to some

anxious nights as they fought to save their Chardonnay - a similar experience to some French regions this April. A decent start to the summer meant good growth and development in the vineyard which later proved to be vital due to a dramatic shift in conditions.

Unprecedented January rain was seen throughout Chile. Viña Requiringua reported 70mm in Curicó, and Araucano 80mm in Colchagua - the highest January rainfalls in over 70 years. At Bouchon, where dry farming is practiced this was a blessing as they normally see close to zero rainfall during the summer months.



“ FOR ME, IT'S THE BEST HARVEST I HAVE SEEN FOR OUR DRY FARMING AREA. WE COULD ACHIEVE LOW ALCOHOL BUT ALSO RIPENESS. ”

Christian Sepúlveda
Bouchon Family Wines

“ THE REDS IN GENERAL ARE OUTSTANDING - ONCE AGAIN AN EXCELLENT CHILEAN VINTAGE. BUT THIS TIME WITH HIGHER LEVELS OF NATURAL ACIDITY AND THE PERFECT AROMATIC MATURITY OF FRESH FRUIT. ” Requiringua are happy with their results

This did cause some disease pressure in the form of botrytis, so Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc grapes were harvested earlier than usual (commencing February 5th) to avoid phytosanitary issues over in Curicó at Requiringua.

The February to April harvest period was decidedly cooler than any recent vintage – the coolest in the past decade. This dramatically slowed ripening and led to harvest dates being around 20 days later than last year in Colchagua for Araucano. Bouchon reported that in Maule their maximum average harvest temperatures came in at 23.8, exactly 4 less than the previous year. This slow and steady ripening can mean more complexity of flavours as well as naturally lower pH levels and higher acidity in the grapes.

Slower ripening also meant less pressure to pick quickly, which proved challenging during last year’s harvest as Covid isolation impacted availability of pickers. This year all our wineries reported a smooth, safe harvest process with Requiringua noting that their priority this year has been the mental health of their teams.

Overall, yields were largely back to normality, with Requiringua reporting increases of 15% on last year’s lower than average numbers.

Personally, I have a sneaky suspicion, that 2021 is going to prove to be a superb harvest in Chile, maybe even one of the best in recent times.



“ MARKED BY ELEGANCE WITH CRISP ACIDITY AS ITS BACKBONE. ”

Diego Vergara at Araucano is equally positive summing up the 2021 vintage



Harvest at Bouchon Family Wines, Maule, Chile



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URUGUAY



Coastal Region, River Plate Estuary/Atlantic Ocean, Uruguay

Despite its distance from the major growing regions of Chile and Argentina, the 2021 harvest in Uruguay followed a remarkably similar pattern to both of these countries. This isn't always the case - given its Atlantic coastline, things can be a little more unpredictable on the eastern coast of the continent.

Bodega Pablo Fallabrino suffered some frosts that caused minimal damage at the beginning of springtime in the Atlántida region. From here on, Santiago Deicas of Establecimiento Juanicó reports that the springtime of 2020 was warm and extremely dry. January rains are not uncommon in Uruguay, and 2021 saw some heavy downpours throughout the country in the second half of the month. As Juanicó dry farm (they don't irrigate their vineyards) this was a welcome relief, replenishing the soils and water table with much-needed water. February was a cooler than average month, with some rainfall that significantly slowed ripening and looked like it might threaten the earlier ripening white varieties.

Fortunately the rains stopped in mid-February until 16th March, allowing the grapes to ripen under much better conditions. Both Santiago and Pablo believe the quality of the whites to be very good. Due to the slower ripening they have slightly lower alcohol levels, slightly less structure and weight and brighter and fresher acidity than their 2020 counterparts.

Regarding the reds, both report outstanding quality due to the long, slow ripening period that enabled full phenolic ripeness and harvesting under good weather conditions - thus ensuring a healthy crop. Tannat stands out for Pablo, which he describes as excellent and a classic style with wines that are superbly balanced. He was also extremely happy with Barbera, which ended with an impressive 14.7% alcohol and superb fruit purity. Santiago was also very happy with the Tannat as well as Cabernet Franc, a variety that I personally see has a great future in Uruguay. Overall, it looks like 2021 is set to be considered a very good vintage.



Pablo Fallabrino viewing his vines in Canelones, Uruguay



“ WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF A HUGE REVOLUTION IN THE INDUSTRY, AND THIS IS WORLDWIDE – NOT JUST IN URUGUAY. ”

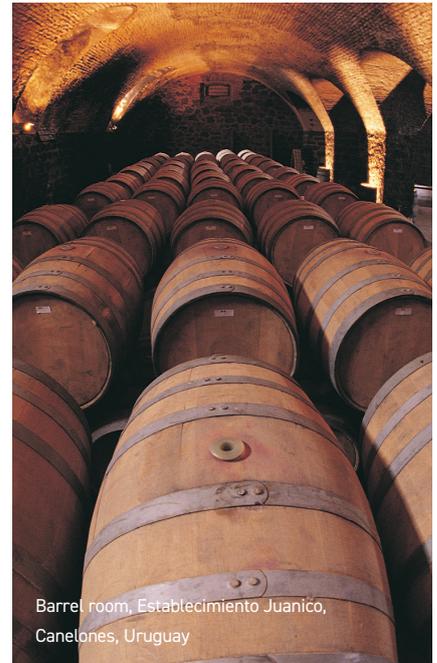
Santiago Deicas, Establecimiento Juanicó

Interestingly, this year Juanicó began to harvest at night as well as during the day. This was largely due to Covid-19: in order to allow harvesting during the day and night and have fewer pickers working together at any one time, thus reducing the effects of possible Covid transmission amongst the picking teams. He believes that it may actually have helped quality due to picking in cooler conditions which may help in maintaining freshness in the grapes and the wines.

I asked Santiago if 2021 showed any similarities to other recent vintages.

“It might be comparable with 2019 - possibly. In my opinion however, the increase in knowledge both in farming and in winemaking techniques have been so impressive in last 5 years, that it makes it difficult to truly compare harvests.”

I think this is very true. Also given the fact that we have had so many different harvests recently, with changing climatic patterns, winemakers have learnt to adapt and use prior experience to help them with their decision-making along the way. This continuous learning process can only bode well for future vintages.



Barrel room, Establecimiento Juanicó, Canelones, Uruguay



Vineyard at Bodega Pablo Fallabrino, Canelones, Uruguay



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