

THE 2004 VINTAGE

GENERAL CLIMATIC CONDITIONS OF THE VINTAGE 2004

The winter 2003 was dry in Chile. Although not as dry as 1998 for the 1999 vintage, where just 150 mm of rainfall were registered in Apalta, the 2003 winter is the driest one since then with only from May 2003 till February 2004 :

- 490 mm of rainfall in Apalta (against 700 mm a normal year)
- 210 mm in Casablanca (against 400 mm a normal year)
- 320 mm in Requinoa (against 500 mm a normal year)

This low level of rains induced an early budding in most of the valleys, around 10 days earlier than usual.

With Chardonnay starting budding, Casablanca registered a severe frost with temperatures reaching down -4°C on September 8, 9 and 10. The frost burnt a large number of buds, reducing the potential crop of 20 to 40% in the valley.

Summer started with rather warm temperatures, average temperatures above 20°C , and maxima reaching $32-34^{\circ}\text{C}$. No rain was registered in Summer.

The precocity of the year observed at the early stages of the growth slowly decreased in most of the situations, with only a few days differences at the “veraison”.

In spite of the precocity observed at most of the stages and the very hot summer that led to predict an early harvest, the tasting of the berries showed a different pattern that made us wait the suitable phenolic ripeness and finally harvest at usual times and even later than usual in some situations.

The harvest time, March and April, was also marked by a few rains, that brought around 60mm of water, (more or less according to the areas). These small rains had a benefic and refreshing effect after the very high summer temperatures, that were increasing the sugar level in the berries and slowly dehydrating some grapes. No Botrytis was observed on vineyards properly conducted, with good ventilation and adequate canopy management.

Moreover, the yields were globally lower than previous years, especially on Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Cabernet Sauvignon, (with smaller size of berries), which contributed to a good ripening process and a high quality of fruit.

Finally, all these conditions enable to harvest ripe, healthy and well balanced grapes in spite of the early hot temperatures and the few harvest rains.

A very promising year !

THE VINTAGE 2004 AT CASA LAPOSTOLLE :

The 2004 Vintage in Requinoa (Cachapoal Valley)

Definitely, Syrah shows very well on our Requinoa terroir. With only 4.000 kilos/ha (6 bunches per plant), the berries were really tasty, concentrated and ripe, when we entered in the field to harvest the first blocks at the end of March.

Fermented and macerated for 20 days, the wines are now aging in new French oak barrels, where they show an incredible and deep color, a great spicy character and personal expression, filling the mouth with nice velvety tannins.

Very low yields and small berry size (only 18 hl/ha) produced great varietal character and well-structured Cabernet Sauvignon fruit, ideally balanced for our classic line.

Constancy in quality and quantity marks our Sauvignon Blanc production. The new vintage 2004 shows, like the previous years, high levels of aromatic intensity, complexity, crispiness and freshness. This constancy in quality is the result of a strict canopy management and an adequate irrigation policy.

The 2004 Vintage in Apalta (Colchagua Valley)

Under unusual conditions with a drought and hot temperatures in Summer followed by a few refreshing rains in March-April, Apalta performed extraordinary well, delivering a wonderful quality of fruit, that express the unique character of Apalta terroir.

Our old vines of Bordeaux varieties were crushed all over April, yielding from 25 to 45 hl/ha. Although still fermenting slowly, partly in wooden vats, partly in stainless steel tanks, the wines show intense flavors, great complexity, richness, with nice velvety tannins on Carmenere, great fruit and elegance on Merlot, and structure and character on Cabernet Sauvignon. Very promising for our Clos Apalta and Cuvee Alexandre reds !

Slowly and slowly, our 6-7 years plantations of Merlot and Carmenere are gaining in character, complexity and volume. The fruit is fine and delicate on the Merlot fermented at lower temperatures to preserve it, and the color is dark and the tannins smooth and sweet on the Carmenere.

On the hills, the Petit Verdot planted in 2000 gave its second fruit (14 hl/ha), showing better balance and more concentration than last year. A very promising blending variety for the hills of Apalta.

The 2004 Vintage in Casablanca

The frost registered early in September explains the very low yields produced in 2004 : between 2 and 5 tons per hectare with an average of 3 tons/ha (22 hl/ha). Following the frost, the vines were not as early in their growing stages as in other areas. However, with very hot temperatures in Summer, always moderated by cooler nights, the few Chardonnay bunches slowly reached their optimal ripeness, to be picked between the 5th and 19th of April, without being affected by the rains that occurred later.

Pressed directly with the stems and fermented partly in tanks, partly in French oak barrels, our tasty bunches gave birth to great fruitiness, character and complexity levels, well supported by an excellent acidity.

The 2004 Innovations at Casa Lapostolle:

1) The reception process

In order to maintain and increase our wine quality level by taking care of every single detail, we kept on innovating in 2004 in the grape reception process, establishing slowly standards of quality reception according to the destiny of the grapes :

1) Hand destemming : Full sorting

Objective : Clos Apalta

Operational in the winery : since march 2002

Number of people required : 80 persons to destem 6 tons per day

The process consists in separating by hand all the berries from their stems, selecting them one by one to put in the wooden tanks only the good, ripe and healthy berries, without any green part of stem. From 20 tons in 2002, 40 tons in 2003, we increased that manual process to 50 tons in 2004.

2) Double selection : Bunch and berry sorting

Objective : Cuvee Alexandre reds

Operational in the winery : since April 2004

Number of people required : 20 persons to sort 20 tons per day

This double sorting line was carried out for the first time in 2004 on 250 tons.

It consists in the succession of the following process :

- A first sorting realized on a 4.5 meters table at the level of bunches to remove the leaves, the unripe, rotten and dry fruit.
- A mechanical destemming running at low speed (1.5 – 3 tons/hour)
- A 1.5 meters vibrant table to remove free juice and small berries (“millerandage”)
- A 9 meters sorting table to sort at the level of berries in order to remove all kinds of vegetal parts, especially small pieces of stems cut by the destemmer, and put in the fermenting vats only berry fruit.

We aim to extend this process to the whole Cuvee Alexandre red range by next year. It will be very interesting in a few weeks to analyze the qualitative differences with the other two reception process.

3) Simple selection : Bunch sorting

Objective: whites and classic reds

Operational in the winery : since march 2000

Number of persons required : 8-10 persons to sort 60 tons per day

Only the first selection at the level of bunches is realized in this process, to remove leaves, unripe, rotten and dry fruit before destemming and crushing.

2) **Fermentation of red grapes in barrels**

For the second year, we fermented some red grapes in new French oak barrels.

The process consists, after destemming manually the berries, in filling the barrels with slightly crushed berries through the small bund hole, and in fermenting the grapes in the barrels, rolling the barrels a few times a day to replace the traditional pumping over.

We made this experiment last year in 2003 on Carmenere and Cabernet Sauvignon, and got amazing and promising results. Both free wine and press wine showed well, with a wonderful smooth texture of tannins, a velvety and a really attractive balance. Although fermented in new oak, the wine showed an early and perfect integration of the oak, that respected completely the fruit flavors.