

Vintage 2011 - Mendoza

2 Sep 2011 by Roberto de la Mota

As the 2011 grape harvest rather demandingly proceeds in the northern hemisphere, celebrated Mendoza winemaker Roberto de la Mota of Mendel (seen here sorting 2011 grapes) sends the following report of the 2011 vintage in Argentina that took place some months ago in the southern hemisphere and was also the result of a growing season that was unusually damp and cool at times.

The 2011 harvest has been surprising in many ways. A late frost in November affected some of the vineyards in the Valle de Uco, Luján de Cuyo and also eastern wine-growing regions. Its effects, at first, seemed dramatic, but over the course of time the impact was far less important than had been expected, as we will see. Later, in the summer, some rain and hailstorms also seemed to point towards meaningful damage. However, not only was this fairly unimportant at a general level, but also the quality obtained, both in whites and reds, was good to very good, and even excellent for some areas and vineyards. In general the wines obtained are aromatic, fresh, with a lot of colour and tannins, with a high alcohol level and medium body.

Spring was characterised by an excellent budding; that is to say almost all the buds left by the pruning were shoots and contained many bunches. Nonetheless, on 9 November a *zonda* wind (dry and hot wind coming from Andes mountains, which always arrives before the cold wind from Patagonia) brought on a major frost, which especially affected vineyards located in lower areas of the Valle de Uco, Luján de Cuyo and eastern Mendoza. All varieties suffered losses, but perhaps the most affected was Malbec. Yet, as tends to happen in these cases, the loss of production in general was less than expected, as the vines have good powers of recuperation or compensation.

Rainfall was normal: 21 mm in October, 14 mm in November and 16 mm in December. Therefore, we can affirm, it was a very healthy period. Summer was very cool and humid, with average temperatures for Perdriel in Luján de Cuyo which had a marked impact on the grapes' characteristics: 22°C in January, 19.6°C in February and only 17°C in March, and the mercury even dropped to 0°C in February, although for too short a time to do any damage.

Rainfall was 44 mm in January and an even more considerable 83 mm in February. Nonetheless, and surely due to good work and previous treatments in the vineyards, general vine health was excellent and therefore so was the quality of the grapes. Grape maturity, under the cool conditions already described, evolved slowly. Already at the beginning of March there was talk of a two-week delay in white wine grape ripeness on average. Later, the same delay was observed in the red varieties.

Without a doubt, the temperatures and rainfall had a great deal of responsibility for the delay in maturity. However, we must also mention that the vineyards' average yields were also higher than usual. After the frost, and after the losses produced in some vineyards by the hail, many producers did not perform their habitual green harvests, and this, together with the excellent budding, made the average production per hectare higher than usual, thus delaying the maturity a little bit.

March was dry and sunny, with a median temperature of 17°C and just 10 mm of rain in Perdriel. April was also very dry and sunny, with a median temperature of 14°C and good daily temperature fluctuation. (The maximum was almost 29°C while the minimum was -2°C.)

These climatic conditions towards the end of the summer permitted excellent grape health, both for whites and reds, and good general maturity. The grapes destined for white wines, both sparkling and still, were harvested at good maturity. In general the wines are aromatic, perhaps more intense than those of last year. They have a lot of fruit and freshness, and some also have herbaceous notes; sought after in the Sauvignon Blanc. (It's worth noting that in hotter years these types of aromas are far more difficult to obtain.)

The reds made from grapes harvested until the end of April (seen here going straight into barrel for fermentation) are characterised by a remarkable intensity of colour - very violet, even in the less coloured varieties. The aromas, as with the whites, are notable for their intensity and freshness. Floral notes and red fruits prevail, followed by more mature fruits, such as black cherries and plums, so typical in mature Malbecs. In the mouth the red wines generally have a lot of tannins and good concentration, but are perhaps less full-bodied than in other years. In terms of balance, the wines have good

acidity, medium to high pH and medium to high alcohol; especially those harvested towards the end of April or beginning of May. Only in those harvested very late are there alcohol values higher than 14.5%.

To sum up: the wines of the 2011 vintage are characterised by their deep violet colours (for reds), great aromatic intensity, especially fresh acidity, medium concentration and very present tannins. All of which assures excellent promise for ageing in wood and subsequent bottle maturation.