

## 2017 Mainqué Chardonnay

by LUIS GUTIERREZ 29th Jun, 2018

### Rating

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The 2017 Mainqué Chardonnay is the second white produced with grapes from their own and their partners' vineyards that are worked by their own team, since the wines are organic and biodynamic. It was picked early, as some peaks of extreme heat made the grapes ripen early on while keeping the acidity. It fermented in barrel and didn't go through malolactic, reaching some 13% alcohol. The élevage was 11 months in barrique, in Damy barrels (some new and some used) that they took from Domaine Roulot in Burgundy. This has more up-front fruit, as the soils are deeper, but the common theme with the top Chardonnay is the salinity and the tasty finish lent by the calcareous components of the alluvial soils. Even though I expected this to have a sharper personality, it was more mellow. A worthy debut, and it was not a small cuvée: 11,000 bottles were filled in January 2018.

*Chacra has planted 0.31 hectares of Trousseau regrafted from Merlot that was planted in 2008, but the vines are not yet in production. For now, they continue with their range of Pinot Noir and two Chardonnays produced in conjunction with Jean Marc Roulot from Domaine Roulot in Meursault. As for the Pinot Noirs, 2017 was a warmish year with some really high peaks, but they changed the irrigation policy and gave the vines a lot less water than they used to; thus, the berries were smaller and ripened to perfection, and it could very well be the finest vintage they have produced to date.*

*Proprietor Piero Incisa della Rocchetta told me that he thinks the improvement is all through work in the vineyards in general—not only irrigation—that they have changed and improved year after year. I had the chance to taste the whites with Incisa and Roulot, and they took time to explain the project. They have been close friends for a long time, but Incisa wouldn't dare ask Roulot to do a wine in Patagonia. But when the opportunity arose, Roulot was thrilled to explore a different place without the constraints they have in Burgundy. So, after visiting Río Negro in the winter of 2016, they got everything ready to start in the 2017 vintage.*

*Chacra had some old Merlot that was part of the deal when they bought the 1955 vineyard, and they had produced a Merlot in the past. However, it was not a wine that fit in their Pinot Noir-only portfolio, so those 40-year-old Merlot vines were regrafted to Chardonnay and Trousseau. By chance, when they did their soils study with terroir expert Pedro Parra from Chile, they found out that plot was the "filet mignon" of their vineyard. So they got very excited about it. They are now planting more Chardonnay and regrafting some more, as they have the idea to build a small separate winery just for the Chardonnay. In 2017, they made 50 barrels that were divided into two wines. They applied Roulot's vast experience with whites and his famous obsessive fine-tuning of the pressing to avoid obtaining harsh flavors or textures in his search for elegant and mineral wines. They have not yet discussed the size*

*of the project, but perhaps the limit might be some 200 barrels. It's a really exciting development, and the wines go straight to the top of the hierarchy of white wines from Argentina. They also had the luck to start in a very good vintage. A development that is worth following.*