

vilafonté

The Vilafonté Story.

Vilafonté is the first American and South African joint wine-making venture within the global wine community.

This ground-breaking red wine project is a partnership between a well respected group of 'quality driven' wine specialists from South Africa and the United States. Vilafonté is the first winery in South Africa to be focused on producing wine specifically for the US market.

The Vilafonté philosophy embodies an obsession with quality, from the soil through to the bottle, and an absolute focus on luxury positioning. The name, Vilafonté, derives from the primary soil type of the 100 acre estate, whose character forms the foundation of the wines.

The Vilafonté team blends a unique combination of knowledge, skills, international perspective, and international recognition. The Vilafonté project aims to create the first Luxury Wine brand from South Africa.

Zelma Long



Zelma is Head Winemaker for the Vilafonté project. Zelma is one of America's best known winemakers with an enviable international reputation. One of the first women to study enology and viticulture at U.C. Davis; she began her winemaking career at Robert Mondavi Winery, rapidly working into the Chief Winemaker position. After 10 years, Zelma was recruited by Simi Winery in Sonoma County. Simi was later acquired by Moët Hennessey, under whom she worked for the next 18 years as both winemaker and CEO.

Zelma won notice for the quality of her wines, especially the Simi Chardonnay and Cabernet. She traveled to Italy and Argentina to provide technical assistance to Moët wineries. She has won many awards, among them the prestigious James Beard Award for Wine Professional of the Year, the MASI award for international wine contribution, and the Wine Spectator sponsored Oral History of a California Wine Pioneer. For 25 years, she has overseen the wines of her family winery, Long Vineyards, in the Napa Valley.

Zelma oversees the winemaking and style development of the Vilafonté wines, and is on site in South Africa during harvest, through pressing and barreling, and then again at blending and bottling. Zelma has sometimes been described as 'fanatical' in her pursuit of quality in winemaking.

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Michael Ratcliffe

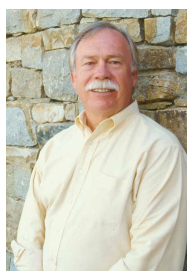


The Vilafonté Managing Partner is Michael Ratcliffe. Mike qualified as a business major before attending the University of Adelaide and was in the first graduating class for the Graduate Diploma in Wine Marketing. Mike is Managing Director of his family estate, Warwick which is recognized as one of South Africa's foremost wine estates.

Mike is a leader in the Cape wine industry. In 1997 he founded Rootstock - an organisation dedicated to the upliftment and education of the youth of the wine industry with a practical focus on marketing and management. He was an instrumental participant in reigniting the concept for a "Cape Blend" (Pinotage-blend) which has since become an integral part of the Cape high-end wine offerings. Mike is a board member of WOSA, (Wines of South Africa) the generic export promotion board for the SA Wine Industry and has participated actively on the marketing committee of the Stellenbosch Wine Route. Mike has been keenly involved in black economic empowerment and land redistribution as Deputy-Chairman of the South African Wine Industry trust.

Mike is President of the United States/South Africa foundation, a registered 301(C) non-profit fundraising charity based in Washington DC. Mike is a regular international wine judge, industry commentator and marketing coordinator.

Dr. Phillip Freese



Phil is head 'Wine-grower' and creator of the Vilafonté vineyard which he calls "Different by Design".

Phil spent 13 years as Robert Mondavi's Vice-President of Wine Growing. Phil designed the first Opus One vineyards, and initiated the remote sensing project with NASA that has spawned a new wave of tools for viticulture analysis and quality enhancement. Subsequently, he established his own Viticultural Practice, and in the last decade has consulted to some California's best, including Cakebread, Far Niente, Seghesio, and Robert Mondavi's Byron Winery. Important to his understanding of South African terroir has been his consulting work with key wineries there, including Warwick, Rustenberg, Thelema and De Wetshof. Phil is responsible for the strategic direction of all Vilafonté wine-growing and vineyard development operations.

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The Vilafonté Vineyard:

- Located in the Paarl-Simonsberg region on the northern side of the Simonsberg Mountains
- 42 hectares with 12 hectares planted in 1998 and 1999
- All Bordeaux varietals:
 - Cabernet Franc 1.36 ha
 - Cabernet Sauvignon 6.08 ha
 - Malbec 0.83 ha
 - Merlot 3.86 ha
- Rootstock is predominantly 101-14 (*V. riparia x V. rupestris*)
- Spacing at 1.2 meter in-row by 1.6 meter between-row to give 5,208 vines per hectare. (Approximately 4 feet by 5.25 feet to give 2,110 vines per acre) The South African average is about 2,500 vines per hectare.
- All of the farming is carried out with motor bikes with 4-wheel drive to reduce compaction from the weight of a tractor as well as the potential for wheel-slippage induced compaction of soils
- All vertically shoot positioned (VSP) canopies
- Sub-surface drainage
- Soils are generally gravelly clay, very old and well weathered
 - The “Vilafontes” soil type is the namesake for the vineyard and the wines
 - Soils are low to moderately low vegetative vine growth potential
- Gently sloping with a generally North Westerly facing topography with all of the rows running parallel to the down-hill slope
- Two row orientations
 - North-North East
 - North West
 - Sunlight exposure in the ripening stages, last 45 days
- Pruning is to bi-lateral cordon
- Drip irrigation is installed
- Annual rainfall in the area is approximately 500 mm (20 inches) per calendar year

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The Vilafonté Philosophy of Wine Growing:

The vineyard is designed to have a low production of grapes per vine, yet maintain an economically attractive yield per hectare due to the high vine density per hectare. This has the multiple attraction of quicker and more even ripening and lower requirements for each vine; which facilitates high concentration and intensity of flavor.

Water management employs local station evapotranspiration (ET) monitoring, Leaf Water Potential measurements and a visual evaluation of shoot growth on our 5 point vine shoot tip and canopy evaluation index. The gravelly soils of the site coupled with the drain tiles and high density vine planting allow for early-season control of vine vegetative growth due to depletion of the winter-stored soil water. Drip irrigation is critical to management of the controlled-deficit water management to maintain vine physiological function while managing the timing of water-induced stress signals for vine and fruit ripening.

Very early season shoot removal is employed to achieve early opening of the canopies for better light and air movement which facilitates the preservation of bud fertility and the ease of spray penetration.

Severe thinning of fruit is permitted by the high fertility of the vines, the high vine density per hectare and thus allows the removal of any clusters on inferior length shoots. Verasion thinning at 85% color change and then again at the end of the verasion period further contributes to the uniformity of fruit ripening that we are seeking.

Current experience shows that our phenology stages of flowering to verasion and verasion to harvest are at approximately 103 to 105 days for Merlot and 105 to 110 days for Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Malbec at harvest sugar readings of 24.5 Brix or slightly greater.