vilafonté

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.