

vilafonté

Q&A – Zelma Long

What is your wine philosophy?

Zelma:

Above all, we want these wines, like children, to reflect their origin, in this case, the site and soils of our Vilafonte Vineyard. The land, a virgin site for vines, was selected in 1997, by Phillip Freese, as a site that he believed well suited to produce outstanding red wines.

Why have you chosen to make 2 styles of wine instead of varietals?

Zelma:

To best reflect the site.

What makes the Vilafonte site special?

Zelma:

In 3 words, geology, geography, and locale. Phil liked the soils he saw; old clays suffused with small pebbles. He felt this combination would restrain the vines from excess growth, but that the clay would provide a source of moisture for the vines but they would have to “work” to get it. After looking deep into the soils – physically, through soil pits throughout the site, he felt he could grow small vines that would each carry a restricted but excellent load of fruit.

The 100 acre site is ideal for wine complexity; it is shaped like a gently sloped bowl, with a slight, but not excessive slope in most all of the site, and with 3 different aspects, north, south and west. Together with the varied soil types, the varied aspects have given diversity of personality to the wines.

The general locale is in the Paarl appellation, on a small plateau on the downslope from the Simonsberg mountain. The site is warm enough to develop good flavor and balance; with enough sun for excellent color; and a slight humidity which gives, we believe, the ripe and well structured tannins we find in the wines. Ocean influence from east and west bring cooling breezes and winter rain.

What is the complex of wines grown at Vilafonte?

Zelma:

The first plantation of the site, in 1998 and 1999, was of 4 Bordeaux cultivars: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Merlot.

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This 12 hectares (30 acres) was planted on 6 different soils, including the vineyard namesake, Vilafontes (which we simplified to Vilafonté).

It is divided into 15 sections. Each section represents a different variety, or variety/clone, or..as nearly as possible...a specific soil type. Having a section uniform in soil type helps us achieve uniformly ripe grapes, a necessity for flavor intensity.

We have been making wines from each of these sections, since we first harvested Vilafonté in 2001. Working with each of them, and keeping them separate, has allowed their personality to emerge. Here are some differences, as examples:

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| Block A Cabernet | Very lush fruit, big soft tannins |
| Block P Cabernet | Great finesse, fine structured tannins, restrained red-black fruit characters |
| Block E Merlot | An easy forward black fruit, very mellow and fleshy textures; |
| Block AC Merlot | Very deep color, hugely aromatic nose, solid tannins, “big” wine |

What is the best way for you to express the site?

Zelma:

Several years of winemaking revealed the diversity of expression of the varietals, and their quality (intensity, flavor complexity). It also highlighted the different ways that each variety was being expressed.

In response I proposed that we make two wines that would reflect and characterize the divergent expressions of the vineyard.

One wine would include the varietal blocks that tended toward forward fruit, open aromatics, with fleshy textures. Experience has shown that this wine style, the Series M, is generally made from our Malbec, the fleshy Merlot, with some structured Merlot, and the Cabernet blocks that tend to be more open and opulent....

Its “alter ego”, Series C, would draw together the Cabernet blocks with deep and complex aromas, often early more “closed”; and with big, rich, firm tannins. Added would be some powerful Merlot and the Cabernet Franc which is refined and fragrant.

And thus, the Vilafonté Series wines were born.