

## vineyard

*Philosophy:* To nurture the land, vines and fruit to their purest form. Everything is done in the vineyard, as well as the winery, from a holistic point of view – with an emphasis on purity and oneness. As our winemaking begins in the vineyard, we take every precaution to farm aggressively, yet carefully at the same time. Our concentration is on quality, not quantity. We encourage our vines to produce low-yielding fruit each harvest, to arrive at a more intense concentration within the resulting clusters.

As an estate vineyard, we're able to control our farming practices in the vineyard throughout the year, from irrigation to soil nutrients to leafing and shoot-thinning practices, enabling us to pull in the quality of fruit needed for premium end results. You'll often find Chad and Greg, as they roam about the property on their weekly vineyard briefings, trading notes and making necessary adaptations. Vineyard manager and winemaker, working in tandem.

**pounds per vine** In all of our writing correspondence, we refer to our vineyard yields in terms of pounds per vine, as opposed to the more common tons per acre. The more archaic system (tons/acre) has become completely irrelevant as more densely planted vineyards such as our own are coming into production throughout the premium growing areas of the state. Traditional vineyard plantings in California, using 12 foot rows and 8 foot spacing between vines, would end up with approximately 500 vines per acre. Our estate, which is planted 8 feet by 3 feet gives us over 1800 vines per acre. While the majority of ultra-premium wine grape growers would find themselves content with three to four tons per acre at 500 vines per acre, we push our field to produce the same, but with quadruple the amount of vines (hence, less fruit per individual vine). By farming for about three pounds per plant, we are confident that our

vineyard site will express itself to its full and most pure capacity. Also aiding in yield control is the dropping of fruit several weeks prior to harvest. We count clusters per vine, and drop the fruit in excess.

**leafing and shoot-thinning** are common practice in the months prior to harvest, to near us one step closer to even-ripening and additional yield control. We triple our field crew at the onset of cluster maturation, to provide meticulous vine management during this critical stage. Beginning with diligent shoot thinning to clear vines of surplus growth, we open up the canopy to provide balance and order. Coupled with a vertical trellis system, aggressive leafing is carried out to clear the 'fruit zone' and provide as much sun exposure to the clusters as possible.

**cover crop** developments are researched every year, as well as our soil tested for existing nutrients. From this learning, we determine the most complementary ground cover to result in the key beneficial nutrients for the vines. Not only does cover crop contribute back to the soil, but it also hosts beneficial insects to naturally aid in the protection of the vines. The 2001 dormant season was planted with beans, oats, vetch, peas and rye.

**irrigation** plays an important role in the development of the vineyard. We utilize a drip irrigation method, with ½ gallon emitters. Our irrigation management practices include depriving the vine of water between fruit set and veraison. The sandy soil also helps matters along, as it drains rapidly furthering the stressing process.

**harvesting** of the fruit is a manual procedure at Melville. Each block is randomly "cluster sampled" for sugar (brix) and ph levels every few days during the month prior to picking. The random sampling is done to provide an overall "snapshot" of the block's ripeness (or lack of). Fruit remains on the vines until

these samples reveal the desired ripeness (while brix and ph levels are factors, the primary indicator is Greg's nose and gut instinct – chewing on the berries, smelling and tasting the juice). We will opt to pick blocks, as ready, as opposed to an entire varietal at will. At the time of fruit collection, we take care to hand pick our fruit to both ensure gentle handling of the fruit, as well as quality of selection. By hand harvesting, we can drop any clusters that appear compromised in any way, or show signs of uneven ripening.

**clonal and rootstock** diversification is a key element to making complete wines. This virtual clonal backyard provides us with an educational outlet of our own to ultimately pull from an array of diverse color, aromatics, textures and flavors. With eleven clones of pinot noir, we can find a bit of everything to arrive at a complete end result.

**high density** pinot noir and syrah plantings are found throughout the vineyard. This is a French method of tightly spaced meter by meter planting, with the theory to 'stress' the vines, as the root systems will need to compete for nutrients and water, as well as the canopy competing for sun exposure. This approach inhibits rigorous growth, thus naturally lowering the yields and furthering the development of concentrated berries. These blocks are bottled separately, capping production at 100 cases per block annually.

Melville Vineyard – Lompoc:  
Santa Rita Hills AVA  
Chad Melville, Vineyard Manager  
82 planted acres (40 west/42 east)

Verna's Vineyard – Los Alamos:  
Santa Barbara County AVA  
Brent Melville, Vineyard Manager  
53 planted acres