Lifecycle of the Vine

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| Stages | Details |
| Years 1-3 | * Vines grow their trunks/ other permanent wood * Developing training system important here * During this time, often vineyard workers have vine focus its energy on vegetative growth, so bunches/undesirable shoots usually removed * Root system begins to explore available space |
| Years 4-6 | * After vine’s permanent frame has grown, the first crops are harvested * First 2-3 crops: trunk/arms still quite thin and over-wintering carbohydrate reserves are relatively low, which limits the vigor of shoot growth.   + This frequently results in a very good fruit to leaf balance/well-exposed fruit. So first few crops can be of high quality   + Famous examples of outstanding wines from young vines: early crops at DRC after replanting in the 1940s, and Stag’s Leap SLV Cabernet Sauvignon 1973 (3-year-old vines) |
| Years 7-20 | * Permanent wood continues to thicken, but proportional increase each year is smaller than the previous year. * With plenty of carbohydrate reserves and an extensive root system, this is the time when the vine is at its most vigorous. * Potential yields are at their highest, but canopy needs to be managed to avoid excessive shading, and excessive competition for photosynthates, which are needed by the fruit. * Compared to the earliest crops, it is common for quality to drop at the beginning this period. |
| 20+ years | * Years of winter pruning slowly weaken the vine. * Summer trimming also has a devigorating effect, as does damage to the roots from soil compaction, drought, pests and diseases. * Declining vigor can slowly restore the fruit to leaf balance that was enjoyed in the early years, but yields also decline. * By the time the vine is about 20 years old, the grape grower may decide that yields have declined to an uncommercial low level. * It is normal for the vines to be ripped out and the site replanted. * Vines in premium sites may achieve fruit prices that can justify continuing to harvest at such low yields, and vine age may be used as a selling feature of the vine (with vielles vignes, alte Reben or Old Vine(s) stated on the label, though there is no legal definition of these terms). |
| 100+ years | * Vines can live for hundreds of years if they’re not overstressed, have sufficient access to nutrients, and avoid damage from termites, fungal infections and other hazards. * Due to phylloxera, there are very few ancient vines in Europe, but a number of 19th century vineyards in South Australia and California are still producing high-quality grapes. |