



Subscribe
and save up to
30% [click here](#)

- Latest issue
- Next issue
- Renew online
- Buy Decanter:
 - In the UK
 - In the US
 - Find your nearest UK newsagent

Receive regular news alerts and our weekly newsletter.

Enter your email address:

Latest News

A world first: cigars for wine lovers

December 19, 2006

Amy Wislocki

A South African wine producer has created the world's first cigar designed specifically to complement the flavours of fine red wines.

Dubbed 'Series X', the cigars were launched by producer Mike Ratcliffe under the Vilafonté label – a sideline to the Bordeaux-blend wines (Series C and Series M) made by Ratcliffe in the joint venture with Californian winemaker Zelma Long.

Ratcliffe, who is keen to stress that the cigars are by no means the main focus of the business and 'just a bit of fun', was frustrated by the poor match that cigars make for fine red wine.

'Most are designed to be smoked with a glass of cognac, and murder any wine you drink,' he said. 'They just overpower the flavours of fine red wine.'

To achieve a more harmonious match, Vilafonté has blended a cigar in a lighter style using Cuban seed tobacco and a Sumatran wrapper.

'It's very much a work in progress,' said Ratcliffe. 'We've gone through two or three incarnations so far, and see it as a 10-year project. What we've learned is that you need the tightest possible coil as this has a positive impact on the smoothness of the draw and softness of the pillow of smoke. We've also switched from a Dominican to the Sumatran wrapper as the latter is lighter and sweeter.'

'We have no intention of ever becoming a player in the cigar market,' he added.

The cigars are available via the company website (www.vilafonte.com) and Ratcliffe says he welcomes any criticism and comments.

'Ultimately we are working on a very specific and complicated project to match the extremely personal flavours of wine and cigar – it's not easy and we can't expect to please everyone.'

Have your say...

To post your comment on this story, email us at news@decanter.com, making sure the relevant headline is in the subject field

I wonder whether Mike Ratcliffe could make a chocolate flavoured cigar to go

- Retailers**
- **UK and Europe**
- **Worldwide**
- Shopping**
- **Property**
- **Recruitment**
- **Books**
- **Accessories & Gifts**
- **Storage & Refrigeration**
- **Tourism**

with my bedtime cocoa? **Terence Lyons**

📧 What a fun idea, well done Mike! Another marketing first, carry on flying the flag!
Erica Meles

📧 Sure there will be wealthy buyers lured by this marketing idea. Let them pay - so the seller is entitled to charge a lot - for their sins, accordingly. **Anon**

📧 After all the concerns and efforts throughout the wine industry to keep smokers away from places where wine is to be enjoyed, I guess only a winery owner who must not be able to give up cigars for an hour or so would put forth this idea. I am not saying that someone who smokes shouldn't enjoy what he/she wants with their wine. It is just that most wine enjoyment takes place with others in a social setting. All smoke - cigarette, pipe, cigar - is quite off-putting to those who choose not to smoke.

With the almost world-wide trend away from smoking in general, it is quite amazing that, of all the types of people to begin a cigar/wine promotion of this order, it is a winery and its principals doing the promoting.

I also point out that in California, Mitch Cosentino has produced a Zinfandel at his winery for several years now called "Cigar Zin" which has captured a place in the market with a wine that is quite port-like in its flavor profile.

Bob Rohden, Chicago, USA

📧 This could be an interesting combination, with a more subtle blend than we are used to. With the smoking ban in effect in most major cities, this may hinder the product from successfully taking off in mainstream America. However, perfect for those late night poker games and gatherings.

Mark Spangler, USA, WineMarketer.com, ClassicWines.com

📧 I first thought of the need of a wine-friendly cigar, when a Hoyo De Monterey (which I usually accompany with single malt scotch whisky), made the cabernet sauvignon that I was drinking, taste like vegetable soup.

Great Idea, congratulations.

Yiannis Papadakis, Athens, Greece

[Click here for FREE decanter.com news alerts](#)

Register on [decanter.com](#) absolutely free for news alerts delivered direct to your email inbox, and our fortnightly newsletter with advance notice of what's coming up in Decanter magazine, offers, competitions and more.

PLUS registration is a one-stop shop for the Decanter magazine Archive and Decanter Fine Wine Tracker.