

First-ever SA/US joint venture set for launch

BY STUART PESKETT

Some of the best winemaking talent in California and South Africa has joined forces to produce two new wines.

Vilafonté is the first South African winery to be focused on producing wines for the US market, although the wines will be launched in the UK next May.

The team comprises head winemaker Zelma Long, who has worked with Mondavi, Simi Winery and Moët Hennessy; general manager Mike Ratcliffe, of Warwick Estates; head 'wine-grower' Phi Freese, of Opus One and consultant

to Seghesio and Cakebread; and Bartholomew Broadbent, who runs Broadbent Selections and will handle distribution.

Series-M is a Merlot/Malbec blend, with a little Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc added. Ratcliffe says that the wine is designed to be 'powerful and seductive, yet accessible to drink at an early age'. The second wine, Series-C, is predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon with a touch of Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Both wines will be produced from vineyards in Paarl, situated on the land between

Fairview and Glen Carlou.

Ratcliffe told *Harpers* that the launch will be 'reasonably low key without any of the blatant pomp and circumstance of some', adding: 'An opportunity to transcend borders and work with phenomenal international wine specialists has been a revelation. Our project has so many firsts and we are excited by all the opportunity. We started out as friends who became a team, who then evolved a dream. Without our site, we could never realise the quality that we are striving for. The terroir has an

individuality that expresses itself beautifully with minimal intervention.'

Long added: 'It has always been my contention that the Mediterranean South African culture and the fantastic geological diversity will yield some of the world's great wines. We are fortunate to be working with an extraordinary site, making wines in a world-class winery with fantastic people. We are all very excited!'

The Series-M is expected to retail for around £30, and the Series-C at around £40. The UK is expected to receive an allocation of around 200 cases.

Top Shiraz

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