

SA wines on a stellar path

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WARWICK Estate has an enviable reputation for its Trilogy Estate Reserve Bordeaux-style blend and its Three Cape Ladies, that proves South Africa's own pinotage can be a serious contender among the world's top wines.

Now the estate has established a partnership with Californian wine guru Zelma Long, husband Phil Freese and Bartholomew Broadbent for a new name on the South African wine export market - and if the quality of these wines is any indication, this country's international reputation can only be on a stellar path.

Long began her winemaking career at Robert Mondavi Winery before being recruited to Siml, that itself was acquired by Moët Hennessey. She has also overseen the wines for her family winery, Long Vineyards, for 25 years.

Broadbent owns and runs one of the most prestigious small import companies in the US, focusing on high-end producers around the world.

His father, Michael, was a long-time wine auctioneer for Christies and is revered internationally for his extensive wine writings.

Together with Warwick MD Mike Ratcliffe, this formidable team is producing Vilafonté wines - a cabernet sauvignon cabernet franc blend (with touches of malbec and merlot for rounding) called Series C

and a merlot-based blend called Series M.

Ratcliffe had sent a friend of mine tasting bottles of each wine and it was a very special evening last Friday, when a group of us shared good company and spectacular premium wines from around the world.

Neither of the Vilafonté wines are cheap, but are well-priced within the bracket they are trading, as was amply demonstrated by the other offerings shared that night.

Series C is produced from the most intense, powerful wines from the vineyards, expressing very deep concentrated fruit and a high percentage of restrained new oak that integrates well with the fruit.

Long's comments are that the wine's aromatics are intense and deep, needing time in the glass and some air to surface.

Once opened, the Series C exudes cassis, blackberries, pepper, chocolate and the warm tones of oak. The deep black fruit and complexity are hallmarks of this wine.

The Series M blends merlot with malbec and cabernet for backbone and is a more supple, fruit-forward driven wine, with silky textures, a good length and approachability.

Long's notes reflect this as a luscious wine with open and seductive aromatics redolent of red plums and black raspberries, distinctive spice and floral undertones. The oak characters are subtle and primarily expressed with vanilla notes.

The wine develops and opens in the glass, and will continue doing so for five years or more in the cellar.