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New Wines, New Faces: Vilafonté Two South African reds have been a "Long" time coming

[James Molesworth](#)

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Who: Vilafonté is the new joint venture between American Zelma Long, who spent 18 years at Sonoma's Simi Winery as winemaker and CEO; her husband, viticulturist Phil Freese; and South African Mike Ratcliffe, whose family owns and runs [Warwick Estate](#) in Stellenbosch.

What to Drink: The debut Vilafonté Series C Paarl 2003 (88 points, \$70) is a blend of 82 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, along with Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec. It's polished, with lots of raspberry and blackberry fruit layered with mocha and spice notes. The Vilafonté Series M Paarl 2003 (89, \$50) is a blend of 41 percent Merlot with Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Similar in style to the Series C, but with less obvious structure, it has lots of raspberry and cassis fruit, along with mocha and mineral notes.

Where: Located in Paarl, between the Glen Carlou and Fairview estates, the 100-acre property already has 30 acres planted to Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Cabernet Franc. The partners plan to plant up to 80 acres, but the process is slow because access to virus-free vine material in South Africa is still limited.

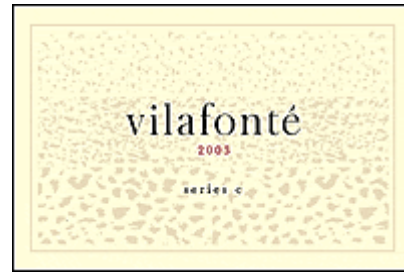


Vilafonté's three partners: viticulturist Phil Freese, winemaker Zelma Long and general manager Mike Ratcliffe.

When: The partners bought the property in 1997, and the 2003 wines are the first commercial releases. The Vilafonté bottlings will be available by mid-August at select retailers and restaurants across the United States.

Why: "It's a chance to take our collective experience and make something from the ground up," says Long, who, along with Freese, has been working on various projects in South Africa since 1990.

Where to Find It: www.vilafonte.com



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