



## Crossing the bar

### Selling wine isn't always only about the stuff in the bottle

Fine art and fine wine are hedonistically good matches, which could explain why Spier is launching its new vintages at the Obert Contemporary gallery in Johannesburg's Melrose Arch in what's billed as an "early cocktail function". Hopefully cocktail refers to the time (6pm) and not the drinks.



Print



Send to a friend

The artist paired with the cocktails is one François Oosthuizen, who served as resident artist for the SA police for over a decade. His subject matter has progressed from criminals to flowers, which must make him especially welcome in wine circles when the SA Wine & Spirits Exporters' Association can spend R2.2-million on a two-week ad campaign on the London Tube featuring flowers and the strapline "Variety is in our nature".

While cross-branding proteas and Pinotage or Shiraz and Strelitzias may lead to hilarious misconceptions as to what exactly SA wine is made of (some producers even tried green peppers a few years ago), cigars and red blends are more natural candidates for cross-branding.

Which is just what Mike Ratcliffe has done with his Vilafonté ultra-premium brand. The latest addition to the Vilafonté range, Series X, is billed as a handmade Cuban cigar. It has a spicy and creamy texture rather than being the more aggressive smoke that works well with 1920 brandy and grappa.

Vilafonté may sound like a Mexican bandit but it is actually the predominant soil type on the 13ha of Paarl vineyards where the first US-SA wine joint venture grows its grapes. The partners are Ratcliffe, GM of Warwick, US winemaker Zelma Long and her viticulturalist husband, Phil Freese, plus marketing whiz Bartholomew Broadbent.

Some commentators reckon their two red blends, Series M (for Merlot-dominated) and C (Cabernet on top), are the Cape's best chance of breaking into the luxury US wine market.