

Wine

CABERNET AND CIGARS

A new take on cross-branding

The sorry state of the Proudly South African marketing campaign was confirmed when I was recently approached by a parastatal to present a cigar-and-whisky dinner to a 40-strong delegation of visiting Eastern European politicians. An obscure choice indeed, since the excellent single malt from the Three Ships distillery in the Western Cape's Wellington is nearly as unknown as the products of the Serengeti Cigar Coy, which lit up the local cigar scene in the 1990s from a garage in Roodepoort on the West Rand.

My replacement suggestion of brandy and chocolate was nixed by the gravy train sommeliers with a sniffy: "The CEO prefers whisky." This despite the fact that at least the cocoa beans are grown in Africa, and brandy, in the shape of the new connoisseur range from Van Ryn and KWV (plus more than 20 pot still stunners from small producers), is proudly South African.

Roving brand ambassador Jason Duganzich of Katzy's Cigar Bar fame duly showed off the best of Scotland and Cuba – and a great (and expensive) time was had by all, except SA producers.

But all that's about to change, thanks to the cross-branding skills of Mike Ratcliffe. Ratcliffe wears as many hats as Hydra: board member of Wines of SA, the exporters' association; founder member of Rootstock, a club composed of young-Turk wine-makers; and MD of family wine estate Warwick. But it's as partner in Vilafonté, a joint



As many hats as Hydra Mike Ratcliffe reinvents wine marketing

venture with US wine gurus Zelma Long and Phil Freese (husband and wife) and Bartholomew Broadbent (son of the grandest UK wine identity, Michael Broadbent), that Ratcliffe is rewriting the local wine-marketing handbook.

Vilafonté styles itself as SA's "first luxury wine brand", and with a cheeky "V" logo – reminiscent of Somerset West producer Vergelegen, whose wannabe icon wine is simply V – it is delivering the goods in the form of a gold medal at the recent International Wine Challenge for its 2003 Series C Bordeaux blend.

Vilafonté produces two reds: Series C (for cabernet) and M (for merlot) with a new addition to the range, Series X, a handmade Cuban cigar. Of course, it's actually made in the mountains of Tamboril, the heart of the cigar-making industry of the Dominican Republic, from Cuban tobacco with a Sumatran wrapper (thanks to US sensitivity about these things). And, designed to complement the complex flavours of red wine, it has a spicy and creamy mouthfeel, unlike those more aggressive smokes that work well with brandy and whisky.

Ratcliffe has imported 25 boxes of 25 stogies and Series X will be available in cigar lounges in Cape Town and Johannesburg from mid-July.

This is arguably the first

example of cross-branding in SA wine and certainly won't be the last. After all, if the passengers of SA's various gravy trains are to be kept in the style to which they have so rapidly become accustomed, a Series P perfume and Series W malt whisky should be next on the designer's drawing board.

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