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## Brave New World

By Susan Kostrzewa



In the plucky spirit of the Paris tasting of 1976, 23 wine lovers gathered for a first-ever South African/California cult wine clash in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on May 26. The wine roster included a 1997 Screaming Eagle and a 1996 Eisele Vineyards Araujo, along with respected Bordeaux blends and Cabernets from solid South African producers such as Warwick and Sadie Family Winery. Attendees were asked to score the wines blind. While California took top spots, South African selections made an impressive showing with scores rivaling or topping some of the best California offerings.

The tasting and dinner, conceived by winemaker Mike Ratcliffe of South Africa's Warwick Vineyards and Vilafonte and hosted by Vilafonte winemaker Zelma Long, sought to further establish South African wines as ageable and collectible, and also benefited charity because of its association with the 2006 Très Bonne Année wine auction (attendance was part of the auction lot).

For Long, who comes from a respected California winemaking background, it offered the opportunity to gauge the quality of an emerging wine region against California wines that fetch top dollar at auctions worldwide.

"To me, it's important to track the evolution of top wines anywhere in the world, and to know and understand the context in which I am working," she said. "I am producing Bordeaux blends so this group was particularly relevant."

Top scores went to a 2003 Bryant Family Vineyards and a 2001 Colgin, but a 2005 Vilafonte Series M and a 2004 De Toren Fusion V scored higher than wines from famed producers like Maya and Harlan.

"I was interested in the event because it represented a sexy auction lot for the auction," said Bill Kohl, president of Très Bonne Année. "But I also immediately realized it was unique because of the cachet due to the reputation of the participants, Zelma and Mike, the wines, and the format following the Paris tasting."