

A black and white photograph of three people standing in front of a vertical wooden plank wall. On the left is a man with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and jeans, with his hands in his pockets. In the center is a woman with short, curly light-colored hair, wearing a dark polo shirt with the 'vilafonté' logo on the chest and jeans. On the right is a man with white hair and a mustache, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and jeans, with his hands clasped in front of him. All three are smiling.

vilafonté

Vilafonté is the vision of the three founding partners – Mike Ratcliffe, Zelma Long and Dr. Phil Freese. Together, they discovered the enormous potential for making premium Bordeaux-style blends from a unique vineyard site in the Paarl-Simonsberg region of South Africa.



Zelma Long is one of America's best-known winemakers with an enviable international reputation. She began her wine-making career at the Robert Mondavi winery, where she was soon promoted to Chief Winemaker. Zelma now oversees the winemaking and style development of the Vilafonté wines, working with the winemaker Chris de Vries. She is on site during the harvest, through pressing and barrelling, and then again at the blending and bottling stages.

Mike Ratcliffe, co-founder of Vilafonté, is the Managing Director of his family estate, Warwick, which is recognized as one of South Africa's foremost wine estates. Mike is a leader in the Cape wine industry, and for many years has been keenly involved in black economic empowerment and land redistribution.

"The creation of the Vilafonté wines has been a life-long dream" Zelma Long



Dr Phil Freese is the creator of the Vilafonté vineyard which he calls 'different by design'. Having spent 13 years as Robert Mondavi's Vice-President of Wine Growing, he designed and planted the first Opus One vineyards. He also initiated the remote sensing project with NASA which has provided modern technology for vineyard analysis and quality enhancement.

Phil works with Vilafonté winegrower Edward Pietersen. This effective wine-growing combination continues to elevate the quality of the Vilafonté fruit to a level commensurate with the production of the world's finest wines.

IMAGES This page – Above – Vilafonté Series M. Below – Vilafontes soil from the estate vineyard. Opposite page – Cofounders; Mike Ratcliffe, Zelma Long and Dr. Phil Freese.

Through the collaboration of these three leading industry figures, Vilafonté (which was founded in 1996) became the first American and South African joint wine-making venture, and these days is considered one of the most pioneering wineries in South Africa.

In recognition of this, Vilafonté has twice been nominated as 'New World Winery of the Year' by Wine Enthusiast magazine, and also receives some of the most impressive scores and ratings of any South African winery.



“Vilafonte is a passion. Vilafonte is all about an unwavering commitment to excellence – in everything we do” Mike Ratcliffe

The 42 hectare estate sits on the bench of the Simonsberg Mountains with its unique vilafontes soils. It is from these unique soils – which are between 750,000 and 1.5 million years old – that the winery derives its name. The first vineyards were planted in 1998 followed by a smaller section being planted in 1999. Vilafonté's wines are produced exclusively from grapes grown on its own property, where Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Malbec predominate.

Vilafonté produces two main wines from its premium vineyard site. Series C takes its name from being a Cabernet dominant style. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Malbec, this is a firm, powerful and concentrated wine, rich in fruit at release and intended for long ageing. Merlot and Malbec dominate the style of the Series M, a wine that is sensuous with a firm structure for ageing with a fleshy yet soft texture.





The Vilafonté project presented an opportunity to grow great wines, from the ground up, investing all the knowledge and experience we gained in our decades of growing and making wine

The limited release second label - recently added to the Vilafonté portfolio - is Seriously Old Dirt by Vilafonté. The Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec grapes used to produce this blend are sourced from Vilafonté's vineyards' younger vines.



IMAGES This page – Above – Vilafonté Series C. Below – Vilafonté corks. Opposite page – Above – Seriously Old Dirt by Vilafonté. Below – Estate Vineyard planted 1998.