

'CHANGE AND INNOVATION ONLY OCCUR WHEN PAIN EXCEEDS JOY'

Now he's filed a patent and has started expanding his crazy notions into beer and even cider, owning all the rights to rooibos alcohol manufacturing. Whether he later succeeds or not is of little consequence on the impact he has already made on the SA wine industry. For the next 20 years, Trevor will make money on every rooibos wine, beer or cider you see.

PUTTING ROOIBOS STAVES IN YOUR WINE BARRELS WAS A BRAVE STEP. HOW DO YOU NURTURE THAT SORT OF INNOVATION?

I think change and innovation only occur when pain exceeds joy. People say I was really clever to think of it, but I say I was desperate. I arrived at that point where I thought, 'How do I go to a retailer or buyer who says to me, "I don't want your brand, I want your bulk wine to sell under my own label"?' What do you do? I either get out of this business or make a wine that is so unique that we don't have a discussion about price. That's why I thought of finding an alternative wood.

Innovation is difficult when you are stuck in a groove. You require brave men to take the first step and Trevor Strydom, the owner of Audacia, a boutique winery in Stellenbosch, is just such a man. Spitting in the eye of the traditional winemaking process that's been passed down through our colonial heritage, Trevor and his team replaced oak staves (added to wine for flavouring) with locally sourced rooibos, creating a completely unique and proudly South African product.

TREVOR STRYDOM IS CORNERING THE INDIGENOUS SOUTH AFRICAN WINE MARKET BY WORKING AGAINST THE GRAIN

WORDS LINDSEY SCHUTTERS

GOING BOS

THRIVE PERSONALITY

BUT ISN'T THAT AGAINST THE RULES OF WINEMAKING?

Legally, you're allowed to use any enzymes or wood. I went up to my winemaker and asked why we couldn't use pine, fig or blue gum. We're so used to using oak because of the origins, we're stuck in that thought process. I was about to give up and came back from the cellar after six months of fighting with the winemaker. My daughter Sarah-Jane said to me, 'just don't give up'. She made me a cup of rooibos tea and I looked at it and knew: there's the answer.

AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

I took it back to my winemaker and we started by experimenting with just tea bags to get the flavour profile. We put tea bags in the wine for about four weeks and then I said to my winemaker: 'Michael, we are going to patent using rooibos wood in wine.' So I contacted a trademark attorney, Nola Bond, and said, 'I know nothing about

'THE BIGGEST MISTAKE ENTREPRENEURS MAKE IS BECOMING TOO COMPLICATED'

patents, who can help me?' She told me about a young guy, Muhammed Vally, at her firm who is fantastic with patent law.

BUT HOW DID A SUIT KNOW WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

We had started explaining the winemaking process, including that we add sulphur as a preservative. Then he said: 'If you add rooibos wood, you won't need to add the sulphur,' explaining that the quantity of antioxidants rooibos contains would act as a natural preservative. It turns out that he qualified as a microbiologist before he became a patent attorney. So just my luck: my daughter and the tea, and the attorney who's a microbiologist.

THAT SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF GOOD LUCK...

It doesn't stop there. Muhammed then said we need to do a provisional patent, which we started working on, and about two weeks

later, a woman drove into the farm asking for directions. While I was talking to her, she told me her husband owns a rooibos farm, Cape Natural Tea Products, which was just down the road. So the owner, Dawie de Villiers, started helping me with the research. In that process, I thought, 'if we can use it to replace sulphur in wine, then what about beer?' There is naturally occurring sulphur in beer. I applied the same thinking to the issue of sulphur in ciders and thus the patent covers wine, beer and cider.

WHO HELPED WITH THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE PATENT AND DEVISING THE PRODUCTS?

We worked closely with Stellenbosch University. Professor Wessel du Toit of the Department of Viticulture and Oenology and his team did all of the research, and I work with Stellenbrau for all the rooibos beer. Windermere is making the cider.



ANY OTHER PARTNERS? THIS PROCESS CAN COST A LOT OF MONEY, SO WHO IS COVERING THAT?

The cost of patenting this worldwide is going to be horrendous, so I approached KVV, they came on board and they have helped with the cost of patenting in 83 international jurisdictions.

AND WHAT'S THE OUTLOOK NOW?

We registered the patent for using rooibos wood in wine and the entire plant in beer and cider, then we trademarked the brands Rooibos Shiraz, Rooibos Merlot, Rooibos Pinotage, Rooibos Wine, Rooibos Beer and Rooibos Cider. I launched a rooibos Merlot, which is in Pick n Pay now, and KVV is launching a Pinotage that they have export orders for. Stellenbrau is already bottling Rooibos Beer and Windermere launched their cider here at the Root44 market on our farm.

TALKING ABOUT THE ROOT44 MARKET, HOW DOES IT FIT INTO THE AUDACIA BUSINESS MODEL?

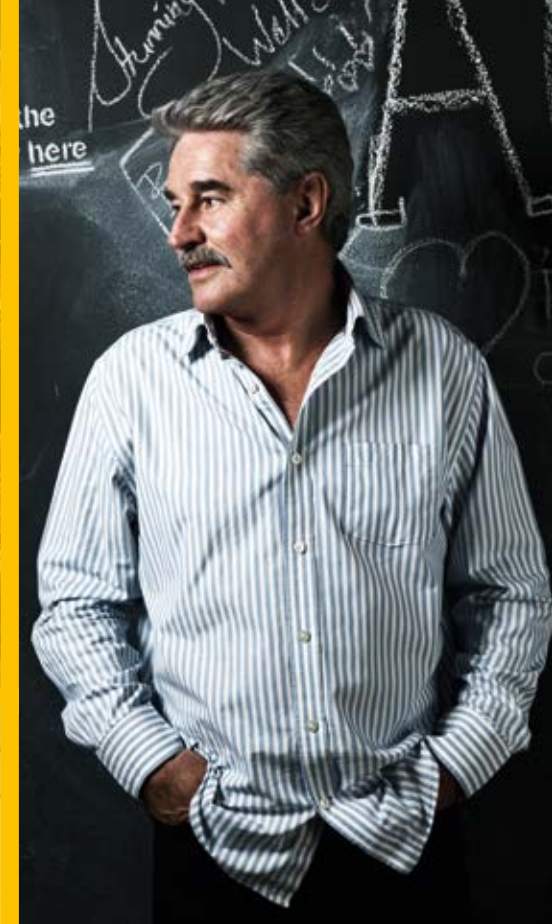
The land Root44 is on is a separate title. I had all the backing and prepared the land with sewage and water to build the biggest wine emporium in the world for the World Cup. Then the global stock market crashed and the investors pulled out. Again I was at the bottom of the pit, trying to find a way out and the pain far exceeded the joy. So I approached a nursery down the road and told the owner to bring the trees and I'd try sell them. I got the tents on a profit-sharing deal. Now the market has grown to support around 150 vendors.

WHAT DO YOU CREDIT YOUR BUSINESS SUCCESS TO?

We have gone from desperation to the idea of finding something unique, to getting the first patent ever in the wine industry using indigenous wood and the first patent ever in the cider and beer industry. All because of hard work and creative thinking.

AND WHAT ABOUT YOUR COMPETITORS?

Well, a lot of people are saying, 'How can you have a patent?' Because no one's ever done it. Easy: you just do it. I'm willing to



sit down and talk about licensing for the patent so that more people can profit. I don't want to steal from people, so a five to six percent fee is fair. If there is any negativity, it is usually because people haven't taken the time to call or come and see me and talk about a deal.

THERE'S AN EXPLOSION IN THE CRAFT INDUSTRY LOCALLY. WHAT CAN OTHER CRAFT BUSINESSES LEARN FROM YOU TO HELP THEM DO BETTER?

The biggest mistake entrepreneurs make is becoming too complicated. With craft beer, we saw this massive boom in the US, then came a big shake-out and only a handful of breweries remained. The key is to limit your product line to one or two products that you do really well, then grow organically from a small base at your brewery to serving in the local supermarkets and staying as small as you can for as long as you can. You get all these restaurants that are very popular and always fully booked; but the moment they double their capacity you start seeing more empty tables and the customers don't like that. Always be in demand by limiting the supply of high-quality product. **Man**