

Frenchman in bid to reintroduce vineyards to city centre



MYRNA ROBINS

HISTORY could soon repeat itself, in great style. Having a vineyard of a noble cultivar at the bottom of your garden would be a talking point in itself. But if it was tended by a passionate French winemaker, and if wine made from the harvest starred your own private label, one-upmanship is guaranteed.

Jean Vincent Ridon is looking for patches of land – 100m² or more – in and around the city. He would like to rent the areas, plant them with vines, make excellent wine and reintroduce vineyards to the historic centre of Cape Town. He would also like to harvest close to his winery, which is housed in an old railway building at Culemborg.

Ridon has lived in Cape Town since 1996. He has been making wine – from grapes sourced from the Boland – under

the Signal Hill label. His wine rests in an old stone cellar below Bree and Loop streets. While quantities may be tiny, quality has been recognised by wine lovers and rewarded by competition judges. His Petit Verdot is delicious, while his first pinotage, the 2000 vintage, received four stars in Platter's guide.

Ridon makes two delicious dessert wines and a fascinating icewine, Vin de Glacière. His Gallic pride swelled when his Signal Hill appeared at Alain Ducasse's three-star restaurant. The mayor of Paris tasted his dessert wine and invited him to make wine from the only vineyard in the French capital. This honour is given to a different winemaker each year. The Montmartre products, about 400 bottles, are auctioned for charity, each selling for up to R15 000.

Ridon has been studying land on the slopes of Signal Hill, Lion's Head and

Table Mountain. He noticed that a city map dating from the early 1960s marks the existence of vineyards at the top of Pepper Street.

He also discovered the remains of old vine stocks in a park in Vredehoek. Ridon intends to plant mostly pinot noir, a little chardonnay and perhaps muscat. This would create a link with South Africa's first vines, planted in the Company's Garden in 1656.

While it would be fitting to mark 350 years of Cape Town's history with a vineyard in the Garden, Ridon says it would be difficult to cultivate, given the people and birds who frequent the area. So, he is calling on business, home-owners and institutions, to spare a little land.

● Contact Ridon on 083 675 02 80 or e-mail ridon@iafrica.com. To taste his wine, visit Wine Concepts at 50 Kloof Street.

Waterfront wine: Jean Vincent Ridon

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