

Extravagant philanthropy: Meet the man behind the Cape Wine Auction

Innovative wine producer and MD of the Warwick and Vilafonté Wine Estates, Mike Ratcliffe is deeply involved in many wine industry bodies - one of which is a founder of the annual Cape Wine Auction (CWA) which raises millions of rands for charity.



Mike Ratcliffe

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What led you to become one of the founders of the Cape Wine Auction?

I have been watching the global philanthropic space for some time and was inspired by a number of charity wine auctions around the world. I felt that the high-end South African wine offering had matured to such an extent that an audacious charity auction like CWA would be able to find traction. Amongst my peers, we had also identified an urgent need to address the significant backlog in education in the South African Winelands.

It was an almost instant success. Why do you believe that it is supported so wholeheartedly by the South African wine industry?

South Africans are inherently generous.

What is your target for Cape Wine Auction 2018?

Our target is to change lives. Our target is to make a difference. We hope to challenge expectations, break down barriers and unite an industry along a philanthropic path. It would also be nice to be able to match the R22m raised in 2017.

Is it difficult to do better each year?

It is difficult, but we are slowly developing a relatively new culture of extravagant philanthropy amongst our donors and our bidders. People are starting to disconnect their donation from value, donating outside of their comfort zone and pushing boundaries on auction lots.

What are you most proud of with regards to the CWA?

Together with a passionate group of intellectually stimulating trustees, we have developed an incredibly innovative model of giving that is really attracting interest both locally and abroad.

And at what you have achieved at Warwick and Vilafonté?

I am very privileged to have an incredible team of people that do a great job of making me look good. My teams are my

most exciting achievement.

Can you tell us about one or two lots already donated for next year's auction that are you particularly excited about and which you think will be hotly bid for?

OK – tough question. The wines, as usual, are extravagant. I will be bidding on the Azura Mozambique lot with a group of friends. I am also loving the Paris and St Tropez lot and the Nederburg trip to follow the 2018 Tour de France is a cracker. For sports-lovers, we have tickets for Wimbledon centre-court, tickets to the 2018 US Open Golf and VIP seats at the British Film Festival. Want to buy a car? We have a few tricks up our sleeves with some big announcements coming soon so watch this space.



One of the lucky bidders at the 2017 Cape Wine Auction (Image Supplied)

Can the public attend?

Yes, tickets are available online at [Cape Wine Auction](#). But hurry - they're going fast!

Is it true that 100% of all monies raised is given to the 27 charities across the Winelands that the CWA Trust supports?

We take pride in the fact that there is absolutely no deduction from monies raised at the auction. This separates us from many of the top charity auctions in the world and the guests can take comfort that their entire bid goes straight to work in promoting education.

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What, - in your opinion, is the state of the wine industry in SA right now?

South Africa is on the cusp of greatness – our quality is better than our reputation and it is going to take an improvement in our confidence to rectify this. Many of the world's greatest wine commentators have proclaimed South Africa as the most exciting wine region in the world. We just need to start acting the part.

What is the future of the Cape Wine Auction?

The Cape Wine Auction is gaining momentum, but it is still a baby and I have committed ten years to get it to where it needs to be. After ten years it is going to require some succession planning which I am trying to work on now. I don't believe that we have scratched the surface and I would like to see us raising R100m over lunch in the coming years.

Also, the Cape Wine Auction Trust has developed such an innovative and transparent methodology with dramatic corporate governance which is now being recognised by charitable trusts, high-net-worth individuals and corporate donors worldwide. We hope to grow our trust to become a conduit for 'safe' donations in the education space.

What is the best piece of leadership advice you have received?

If you believe in something go out and do it. Others will follow you if you are right.

The 2018 Cape Wine Auction takes place on 10 February on the Rustenburg Wine Estate in Stellenbosch.

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