Finding a ‘Blue Ocean’ strategy in today’s competitive wine market is crucial, especially for new and smaller wineries. Red wine boutique winery, Audacia Wines in Stellenbosch, found theirs by launching an exclusive new product – a Merlot with no added sulphites or preservatives, made using Rooibos and Honey Bush wood.

by ELona HESSELING

One of the main advantages of using Rooibos and Honey Bush wood is its antioxidant action, making it a potential alternative to Sulphur Dioxide (SO2) – this is also one of the uses for which the patent has been registered.

Professor Wessel de Toit of Stellenbosch University’s Department of Viticulture and Oenology is currently investigating the use of Rooibos and Honey Bush as a potential sulphur replacement and wood alternative. He explains that these species are rich in phenols, which are extracted relatively quickly and acts as an antioxidant. “However, the process and whether or not these phenols have any antimicrobial effect, is still relatively unknown,” he says.

By using these wood chips, Michael explains that he doesn’t need to add any SO2 – “as long as the grapes are clean and healthy”. Rooibos and Honey Bush wood was used for the first time during the 2012 vintage on their Shiraz – mainly because there were enough grapes for these experiments. The first wine to be commercially available is the 2013 Merlot.

The 2013 Merlot sells for R180 per bottle and being a proudly South African wine, it was selected as one of the 450 officially recognised projects of the World Design Capital Cape Town 2014 initiative.

Although it’s still early days, Trevor and Michael may well have succeeded in creating their own ‘Blue Ocean’ product. But they’re not finished yet – this dynamic team recently started doing new “home” trials by toasting the Rooibos and Honey Bush chips in the oven…

Despite having no sulphites or preservatives added and made using Rooibos and Honey Bush wood, the wine’s quality remains the most important feature for Michael. Although this is very much still a work in progress, there is no doubt that this patented technique has enabled Audacia to produce a truly unique South African wine.