Rooibos wine targets health-conscious drinkers

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In South Africa’s scenic wine growing Western Cape, the Audacia winery wants to revolutionize the region’s famous industry after patenting a new technique that used Rooibos and Honeybush in the production of wine, beer and cider.

With wine lovers globally looking for healthier ways to consume their favorite tipple, research conducted by the Department of Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch University, found there were powerful antioxidants in Rooibos and Honeybush which may help preserve the wine naturally.

This method has the potential to eliminate the need for sulphur dioxide and other synthetic materials and preservatives.

Journalists were recently invited to sample the new Rooibos drinks at the Audacia wine farm in Stellenbosch.

Rooibos, a South African native tea, has been grown in the country for centuries. In the past decade, it has become popular with health-conscious consumers around the globe, leading to growing production and sales. “Roughly half the rooibos crop is exported, the rest is consumed on the African continent of which the vast majority would be in South Africa. South Africa being the biggest rooibos consuming country in the world. If you look further afield Botswana has become a very strong market for rooibos. Zimbabwe also knows the product very well there are several brands in Zimbabwe, then if you look at what some of the supermarket chains are doing in Africa Nigeria for instance, rooibos typical South African brands are finding their way into those markets as well,” said Dawie De Villiers, managing director of cape natural tea Products.

The new Rooibos wine is the brainchild of wine farm owner Trevor Strydom who started experimenting with the process after drinking a cup of rooibos tea served by his daughter.

He and winemaker Michiel van Niekerk put rooibos tea bags in wine and found that it reduced the need for allergy-inducing sulphur and other common preservatives.

They now use the rooibos wood chips in the wine making process instead of the traditional oak.

“I see it being drunk all over the world, we registered the patent in 83 jurisdictions worldwide, we are already exporting the wine to China and it definitely will be drunk all over the world,” said Strydom.

Rooibos and honeybush wood are unique in that they contain no caffeine, low tannin levels making them ideal for use in wine, beer and cider as a natural preservative and flavoring product.

“It’s going to have definite effects on the global market because the market looks at competitors and especially not having to add sulphur, there’s a huge advantage to the process and that changes the brand, it gives you a new brand that the healthy conscious world looks at so I’m pretty certain on the back of the rooibos brand that’s already around the world you will definitely see traction, but then even as a standalone product because its new its innovative it’s got a marketing edge and obviously if they do it cleverly they will get market share quite quickly,” said Alan Windle, minister of economic opportunities for the Western Cape government.

The Rooibos brand is internationally patented, making it a unique and typical South African product.

The plant is grown in the Cedarberg region of Clanwilliam and draws hundreds of tea lovers every year to the district.

In the Western Cape roughly 167,000 people are employed in the wine sector.