

Kalk Bay's first vintage is almost ready for the bottle

From bergie mess to thriving vineyard. **Helen Bamford** reports

JUST OVER three years ago a tiny Kalk Bay plot contained nothing but a few hundred bottle-neck drug pipes and a couple of tons of bergie poo among some makeshift shacks.

Today it is a thriving vineyard boasting 650 cabernet franc vines, and the first harvest is now being made into wine.

Owners Kenneth McClarty of the nearby Olympic Café and writer Karena du Plessis are expecting around 600 bottles and are still toying with what to call it.

It will probably be a toss-up between Olympia Block – because of the café – or A Stone's Throw, because of its proximity to the sea.

In fact, it is so close to the waves that some of the vine leaves even suffered salt burn, but this is likely to add to the flavour in the long run.

The two are delighted with the vineyard's progress, recalling this week what an unsightly mess the plot used to be.

Du Plessis said the land had belonged to her husband, Alex Bassios, and his family, who are long-time Kalk Bay residents.

"They used to have the Olympic Café when it was an old-style Greek café, before it became the restaurant."

McClarty said he had been keen to turn the plot into a market garden to grow produce for his deli at the same time that Du Plessis had set her heart on turning it into a vineyard.

So they had both started

clearing it before reaching a compromise – which is mostly vineyards, but also tomatoes and granadillas for the restaurant.

Du Plessis said their venture had attracted a lot of interest and support.

"Though, one day a woman walked past and said we were doing it all wrong. I was so annoyed, but she turned out to be Rosa Kruger, a viticulturist at L'Ormarins, who has not only become a friend but has also given us invaluable advice."

Du Plessis has done a wine-making course, but said she found it very technical.

"It's a bit like chemistry, so we've decided to leave the wine-making to Jean-Vincent Ridon, who is opening a winery in the CBD." Their wine will be made at the new winery in the Mandela Rhodes Place complex in Church Street, which is due to open to the public shortly.

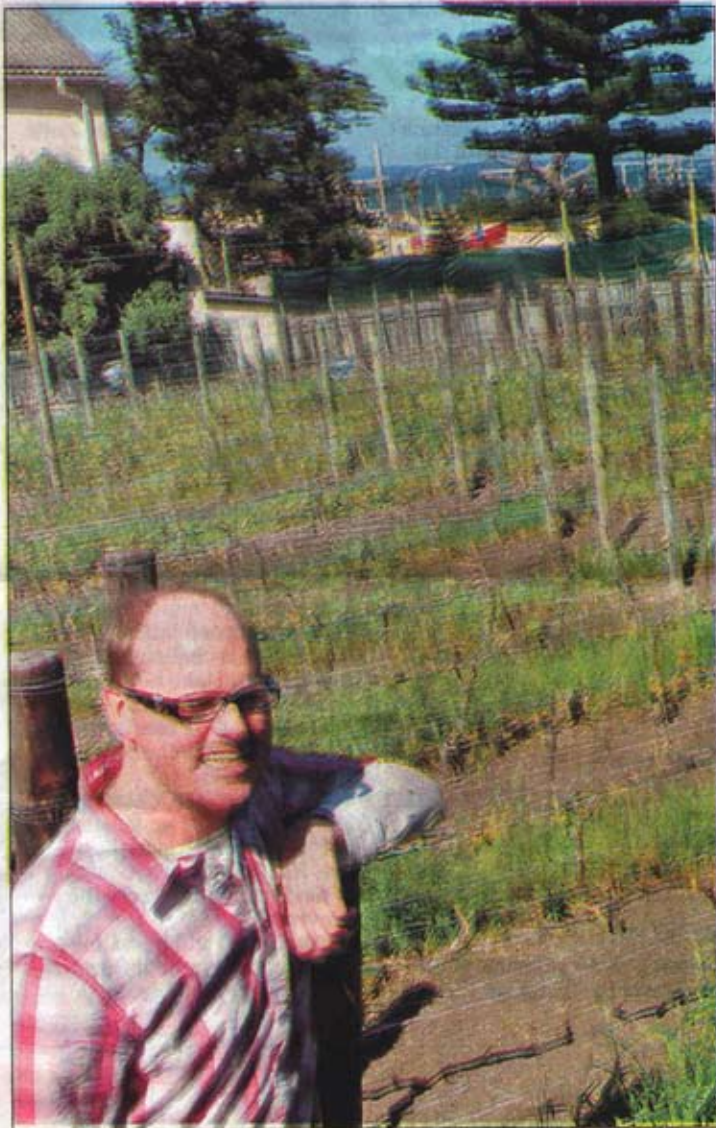
The first harvest took place in February and yielded a surprisingly large 650kg crop of grapes.

McClarty said that on picking day friends and family came to help. "We had a few special picking baskets, but eventually we had to raid the deli to get anything that could hold a bunch of grapes."

The vineyard is more of a hobby than anything else, although they have both learnt a lot.

"It will also be nice to have something special to serve in the café," McClarty said.

helenb@incape.co.za



SOPHIA STANDER

■ McClarty's vineyard is a stone's throw from the sea.