

News

Profit looms as Kiwi wine firm deepens ties with screen star

Aimee Shaw

Walkato-based wine and spirits company Invivo & Co has appointed *Sex and the City* actress Sarah Jessica Parker to its board as it moves towards turning a profit.

A shareholder in the company, Parker has been working with Invivo, which found its feet internationally following a collaboration with Irish talk show host Graham Norton, for coming up to two years.

Parker is an executive director and attended her first board meeting with the company in New York in September, when the company set up a support office in the United States.

"She is a very successful business-woman in her own right. She has a lot of thoughts and ideas [for] the brand and comes back with a lot of feedback," Invivo co-founder Tim Lightbourne told the *Herald*.

Invivo launched its first Sarah Jessica Parker-branded wine, a Sauvignon Blanc made from Marlborough grapes, in September. About 400,000 bottles were produced and sold out to distributors globally in three months.

It is now preparing to launch a rosé with the actress in the new year.

The 14-person-strong company this year also expanded its range with Graham Norton, who it first began



Graham Norton

working with in 2012, and produces wines, gin and a prosecco under the British funny man's name. It

also makes non-celebrity branded wines, distributed in the US, Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Japan and Canada.

Britain is Invivo's largest market by revenue sales, the US set to surpass Britain in the next 12 months. It expects to be profitable and sell around four million bottles this later year.

Norton is also a shareholder in the company, which was founded in 2008 by Lightbourne and winemaker Rob Cameron.

In February, the *Herald* revealed

Parker had teamed up with Invivo to collaborate and develop wines on an ongoing, annual basis, a similar partnership to that of Norton's with the company, which sees Parker decide the grape variety, final blend, labels and name the wines.

"We are really proud of the work we have put into the sauvignon blanc and happy to see it selling so well," Parker said in a statement.

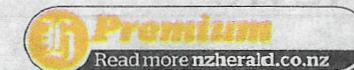
"Blending the rosé was a fulfilling experience and I am looking forward to adding it to our collection of wines."

Invivo has crowdfunded twice and



Rob Cameron (left) and Tim Lightbourne, who says Sarah Jessica Parker always brings a lot of ideas to Invivo's table.

Invivo coming up rosés as SJP joins the board



equity raised a total of \$6 million since 2015. It has more than 700 shareholders today and has received investment from Parker.

Lightbourne said it was not looking to raise any additional capital at present, and expected to begin paying a dividend to investors in the next three to five years.

Invivo turnover has grown by more than 570 per cent since 2015.

The opportunity to work with Parker came about after Invivo reached out to her agent.

"I think she liked our down-to-earth Kiwi approach," Says Lightbourne. "She also, believe it or not, was buying our wine already."

Invivo's association with Norton and Parker propelled its expansion into Europe and North America. The company was ahead of the curve in recognising the opportunity surrounding what is now known as influencer marketing.

Lightbourne, who has a marketing background and previously worked for L'Oreal, said the partnerships with Norton and Parker were more than an endorsement.

"We never had a huge amount of money starting out and did the hard yards, launched in the GFC and had it tough, we were hand-selling wine ourselves all around New Zealand for a while. Where we've had an opportunity in the early days was with Graham, we've really jumped on it and built that relationship."

"It has built over the years for us, I think it's key to have that authentic partnership piece, where it is not like a one-off or the name's just on the label. That's key for any influencer marketing, it is [about] making sure that person is in it for the long term."

The United States is New Zealand's largest export market for wine, worth US\$442 million (\$675m) annually.