

Wine Labels: Think, Create, Effervesce



They are fairy tale illustrations for adults; lavish, paintings of worlds we would love to visit, or glimpses of people and animals magical. They are wine labels, and each and every one tells a story of a vintner working hand in hand with a designer to find a way to communicate a wine's philosophy in ink and paper.



David Schuemann, owner and creative director of [CF Napa Brand Design](#), has brought together many of those stories in his new book [“99 Bottles of Wine: The Making of the Contemporary Wine Label.”](#) as sumptuous a treat for the eyes and imagination as the wines themselves doubtlessly are for the palate. So put on a little classical music, let your favorite Merlot breathe a little before dinner, and enjoy the following excerpt.

(And for more on wine label design, don't forget to catch the instant replay of our recent free webinar, [“Designing Spirited Labels”](#), with guest speaker Kevin Shaw of Stranger & Stranger.)

(Click to enlarge images)



Scarlett
 Wine
 Scarlett
 Like so many winemakers and artists, Vincent Barber is a wonderful blend of perfectionist and visionary. He is not interested in just making wine. He wants to make handcrafted, small production, ultra premium wine that captures the best of California Wine Country and that are elegant in structure and balance and consistent in quality, vintage after vintage. Vincent has the perfect mindset and ambition to work with a vine that was inspired by the Barbedich specialties of the Targa Valley, a health where the days are hot, but the cool evenings cooled the ripening time. Vincent wants to raise the bar, setting the production to the highest level a vine. And he wanted the brand that would point his daughter's heritage.

When Vincent came to us, he wanted the packaging for his wine to be modern and artistic, something truly special and subtle, while still honoring his daughter. We took our inspiration from the more, distinctive style of French painter Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), an art movement pioneer whose sense of art and advertising posters often featured lovely women with exceptionally flowing hair. In the modern-day world of an European illustration, we found exactly the style illustration we wanted, a young woman of classic beauty. We searched that image into a brilliant color and then we were gold! Not only does the flowing hair, flowing and elegant, the resulting label is a true reflection of Vincent's passion of the vineyard.



Sea Smoke
 Wine
 Sea Smoke
 Like many great winemakers, Bob Dornik believes that the best wine are vintage expressions of the land, with climate and soil the spirit of where they are grown. From that point of view, Bob Dornik has found a perfect place to make Champagne-style Pinot Noir of unsurpassed quality and character: an olive orchard at foot on the western end of the Santa Rita Hills, outside Santa Barbara. This is a warmer site, Bob's vineyards are bathed in sunlight and heat, but come evening, up the Santa Rita River canyon comes a breeze of cooling maritime fog, called "sea smoke," cooling the vineyard and the fruit. That sea smoke gives Bob one what he wants: the consistent, consistent period, absolutely essential to the growing and cooling of world-class Pinot Noir.

In a sense, Sea Smoke was a natural, but Bob knew he also needed an elegant and distinctive label, something that would pay tribute to his vineyard's privileged location and its special spirit of place. We listened carefully to Bob, studied the character and essence of his property, and absorbed the feeling, and then we set out to create something that would be subtly unexpected and not die.



We created a label that discreetly evokes the feeling of sea smoke through a swirling, hand-drawn line that curls with movement and grace. We created the initial draft of the fine-lined wordmark, and then we took it to the studio, the late Donald Young, a king of the art of calligraphy and a man who could convey a mood or a feeling with a single flowing stroke of his pen or brush. What Donald created is a masterpiece of calligraphy: the same fine-lined wordmark in flowing lines and curls, a sense of motion and aliveness. Bob's sea smoke rolling up the foot of the canyon. With a similar mood, the back label was designed to draw the eye up to feature on that it looks as if the eye is rolling into the fog as subtle touch that never will fall gently into the viewer's consciousness.

In a marketing sense, we created a name label for Bob's wine, a complete Champagne that Bob Dornik offers to his top five hand-crafted guests, free of charge. This is not like government wine is the spirit of the wine.



Slingshot

winery: Slingshot Winery, Napa, California
winemaker: Dean Valley, California

In 1999 Michael Jensen sold his Houston-based computer business and moved to the Napa Valley with the dream of making great wine. He founded Slingshot Winery and hired the talented consulting winemaker Paul Drabik with the mission to create a super premium Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. Now they were off to a brilliant start.

Nine years later, Michael's son, James, left a budding career in media TV in Los Angeles and came to the Napa Valley to help his father—and to leave the main business from the ground up. One on the road selling wine, James spotted an opportunity: one small grape from his dad's vineyard to create a line of lower priced wine aimed at youthful consumers. And so Slingshot was born. In James' eyes, this is a brand young to learn with attitude and energy. "It's about getting your feet dirt-covered while figuring out what's going on in the world or following the rules," he says. "The bold, be adventurous, show your own path and, above all, remember to have fun!"

Several years after the initial launch of Slingshot, James asked CF Paper to reimagine the brand and messaging. Finding that the original label and packaging did not match the brand's young, energetic spirit, we developed the tagline "Inventively made in the Napa Valley." Then, building on the refined positioning and spirit of the existing slingshot logo, we found a graphic image that would dramatically convey the brand's spirit: a bullet hole. The image, both familiar and impactful, was perfectly suited to take the visual lead on the label.

The resulting label design features a hole that is die-cut through the bottle cap and the label itself, allowing the juice of the bottle to show through as if the label has been shot through by a slingshot projectile. The effect complements what is undeniably one of the more eye-catching wine label designs on the market today.

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Duckhorn Wine Company

winery: Napa Valley, California

Dave Duckhorn grew up in Northern California, earned his MBA at the University of California, Berkeley, and then headed into a traditional career in business. In 1971, though, Dave became president of a vineyard management company, and suddenly a whole new world opened at his feet. Soon he was tramping through vineyards in Napa, Sonoma and France, learning about wine from the ground up. Before long, he was hooked.

In 1976, Dave and his wife, Margaret, launched their signature winery in the heart of the Napa Valley, invest in crafting beautiful varietal wines in the great Bordeaux tradition. They succeeded, brilliantly, and today Duckhorn is considered one of the leading wine producers in the whole of North America.

Duckhorn's Vision

When they came to CF Paper, the folks at Duckhorn had one overriding ambition: to make their brand even more successful, while still retaining the best brand qualities that made it so true to the best glass. They also wanted to communicate their sense of vision in a way that could be understood that had become prominent at their respective target groups.

Over the years, the Duckhorns had built their brand and their image around a rich heritage of ducks. Ducks were featured on many of their labels, and the work of many nature artists was also showcased in the winery's tasting room.

For the Duckhorn brand, the mallard duck was definitely an equity driver and so we set our sights on reworking the wine and holding on to its most effective image.

The first task was to redesign the company's main label, Decoy, and transform it into a widely distributed, easy-to-read wine brand. To do that, we made the Decoy packaging far more upscale and more communicative with the quality promise of the other wines in the Duckhorn family. Our second task was to reinvent Decoy in Bordeaux, but without detracting from the higher priced Duckhorn wines. Thus we were able to leverage the beautiful painting of the mallard decoy on the existing Decoy label. The theme was maintained with a much more premium design, and color. Then when the Duckhorn company was invited to design a special red with the intention of being Duckhorn's subtle bridge to the larger Duckhorn portfolio.

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Duckhorn Vineyards Merlot Napa Valley

The main challenge was to add the visual contrast between the main text and the higher-end, vintage design wine. They've had to establish two clearly different looks for the site, but they still needed to present a cohesive family feel.

In examining the main site Duckhorn label, we identified its signature elements in the brand's color label color and its iconic duck logo. When we looked more closely, though, we saw that the duck logo was not automatically correct

for the species, after putting it at odds with the brand's top-to-bottom aesthetic. To reduce that inconsistency, we worked with a custom artist to refine the duck logo more accurately. Next, we created a new watermark that echoed the brand name so that it could be stamped in on the individual packaging. We also developed a proprietary paper texture for the brand that looks like water ripple carried out of wood.

Duckhorn Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley

The vintage design for this wine was designed as a larger label with a smaller duck nested along with clearly identical material information. This way, at a glance, it could be easily differentiated from the main Napa Valley line, while still ensuring family proximity to the larger brand family.

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The Duckhorn Napa Valley

We had our first challenge to create an exciting, high-end package for The Duckhorn. Duckhorn's new Cabernet Sauvignon brand had Merlot. The Duckhorn was to be their top-of-the-line wine, the highest expression of the Duckhorn estate, and the packaging needed to convey that expertise. The Duckhorn story began over three decades ago. Before crafting their very first vintage, the Duckhorns and their winemaker had a passionate discussion about what direction to follow. Should they make a wine in French style (Merlot) or should they focus on making something unique to the area, the Duckhorns chose to focus on crafting varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon. Still, Duckhorn Vineyards remained focused by itself. Merlot,

and when it decided to create a proprietary name for its top-tier wine, the name The Duckhorn naturally came to mind.

For The Duckhorn, we designed a rich black label and drew the duck icon to read vertically in the gold foil. To honor this conceptual vision, we designed a custom line crafted from a duck response (the material defined with the branding that has become almost as much of a collector's item as the wine itself).

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Educated Guess

Region: River Valley Winery, St. Helena, California
Wine: Cabernet Sauvignon

Growing grapes and making sophisticated wines are not exact sciences. In the contrary, both require from long years of experience, sensitive and the natural elements make strong existing in the vineyards and wine culture. From old grandfather ideas plays a role too. With so many variables, it is no wonder that in wine circles you hear endless debates about what is more important: the hand of the winemaker or the hand of Mother Nature. Winemaker Mark Aldrich knows these inherent connections with the name Educated Guess, the first vintage and the flagship brand of his young Napa Valley winery, River Run Deep. The name also contains a subtle appeal to today's wine consumers, who now often choose a wine shop or a representative and is confronted with a bewildering array of hundreds of bottles and labels. Faced with so many choices, how is a consumer supposed to make a sound buying decision? Well, you will be "educated guess."

For CP Paper, the challenge here was complex: to create the brand's quality spirit on the label yet remain sophisticated enough for the wine's price point. The center is one of the most distinctive labels in American wine. The rich black label features the blackboard for the handwritten formulas that occur naturally in the winemaking process or are induced by the skilled winemakers. The formulas are scattered across the label as if some forced elements of winemaking were exploring the creative and scientific frontiers of what can be created. Although the formulas are just on the label are not, you do not need to be a chemistry major to get the message: making sophisticated wine is both a science and an crafted art form, as just a few sips of Educated Guess will make deliciously clear.



Cycles Gladiator

Region: River Valley Winery, St. Helena, California
Wine: Cabernet Sauvignon

The spirit of California's Central Coast is fresh and wild. Its rugged, unspoiled Pacific coastline, its sprawling vine forests and its fascinating vineyards have long attracted painters, photographers, writers and adventurers like John Bierbeck and Henry Miller. And today the Central Coast remains a necessary focus, a place to dream, a place to live, a place to breathe and create, unspoiled and free.

The label itself, with its deep roots in Mountain County, set out to capture that spirit in a special line of wine, each celebrating the area's artists and Bohemian roots. In the brand's view, the brand packaging would need to be characteristically California but with a definite European flair. For inspiration, we looked at many paintings and drawings before settling on the classic French posters that celebrated Paris' bohemian life in the 19th. And then we found in a poster depicting a new breed of bicycle, Cycles Gladiator.

The original poster was created by G. Manier in 1895, and its main and imagery served a purpose in the Napa Valley's line of fresh, exciting wines.

We created the poster and its typography into a label with bold colors, swirling movement and an exhilarating feeling. The label features a multi-colored with a swirling mass of red, blue, yellow and white, although there is a sense of controlled movement and speed, a beautiful and exciting image of personal and artistic freedom.

The imagery worked wonderfully for the brand. Consumers loved it, both in how it felt, the history, and the Cycles Gladiator label was so successful that we have since extended the brand to a whole line of wine featuring European posters are centered on bicycles and serving as a central focus for marketing campaigns targeting and French wines. The success of Cycles Gladiator also came with a delicious side of controversy: the brand was initially banned in California due to the concern reality on the label. Miller responded with a unique and dark wine brand appropriately named Banned in Basic County.

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