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OCTOBER 2012

# Gourmet Packages Team Substance With Style

Packaging that looks great and performs well is the name of the foodie game.

By Kate Bertrand Connolly, Packaging Editor

**P**ackaging plays a pivotal role for gourmet and artisanal foods, expressing the products' cachet and capturing their specific brand personalities and values. Materials, decorative treatments and package design work together to elevate consumer perceptions of luxe brands, not only when the products are on the shelf but throughout their life cycle.

For Brix Chocolate Inc. ([www.brixchocolate.com](http://www.brixchocolate.com)), Youngstown, Ohio, educating consumers about its products created an additional packaging challenge. Brix produces super-premium chocolate intended for pairing with wine. The Brix product line is primarily chocolate molded into brick-like bars but also includes quarter-ounce "bites" of chocolate.

The packaging for Brix products "has to instruct the consumer, because this is a new [concept]," explains Nicholas Proia, founder of Brix. "We needed to take them by the hand and tell them how to use it: what wines are suggested and why, how you serve it and how you store it, how to fracture it with a sharp knife."

On boxes for individual 8-oz. Brix bars, the brand's core product, tasting notes and wine pairings are rendered in a script typeface to resemble handwritten notes from an oenophile's notebook. The information, plus brand identification and chocolate variety, are printed on a paperboard sleeve that slips around the box. The sleeves are color-coded by variety: Extra Dark Chocolate, Medium Dark Chocolate, Smooth Dark Chocolate and Milk Chocolate.

The box for the individual bars is made from brown box board laminated to woodgrain-decorated paper that's foil stamped with Brix's circular "Chocolate for Wine" logo. The same logo is debossed into the top of each bar. Brand identity and packaging design firm Michael Osborne Design Inc. ([www.modsf.com](http://www.modsf.com)), San Francisco, designed the Brix packaging.

By using the same box for all the 8-oz. bars and swapping out sleeves to identify the type of chocolate, Brix avoids the need to stockpile separate boxes for the different bars. The sleeve provides a packaging solution that's "easily adaptable to variances in sales" of the various bars, Proia explains.

Brix and Michael Osborne Design took the packaging to an even more sophisticated level with the Brix Collection Variety Gift Set, a 16-oz. sampler containing four 4-oz. bars. The gift set package is a box in the shape of a book. The chipboard box is wrapped with paper that is lithographically printed and foil stamped.



The words may mean "naked moon," but the moon on this wine bottle is highly embellished.

A decorative plastic seal, designed to look like sealing wax, is glued to a brown grosgrain ribbon, which in turn is glued across the book's faux text block. A magnetic closure concealed in the box top adds a unique, upscale touch. When the consumer is ready to put the box away, it shuts with a satisfying snap, thanks to the magnet.

Brief pairing notes and product descriptions, plus quotes from well-known wine makers, are printed on the bottom of the box (the back of the book, that is), and a fuller description of the four chocolate varieties, including tasting notes and pairings, is printed on the box's inside cover. A pamphlet inside the package provides information about "how to maximize your tasting experience" and provides instructions on how to break the brick into bite-size pieces.

## Evoking an Italian moon

Like chocolatiers, wine makers take packaging very seriously. The story behind the recent Luna Nuda Pinot Grigio label redesign illustrates what the right packaging can do for wine sales. Luna Nuda is made at a fourth-generation estate winery in Alto Adige, Italy, a region known for pinot grigio. Currently, Luna Nuda is distributed only in the U.S.

The brand owner "wanted a package that would break from the clutter of other Italian wines [and] reinforce the name Luna Nuda," which means naked moon in Italian, says David Schuemann, owner and creative director of CF Napa Brand Design ([www.cfnapa.com](http://www.cfnapa.com)), Napa, Calif. CF Napa designed the brand's new label.

"The real challenge was to retain sophistication appropriate for the price point and quality of the wines while also



For Ici Ice Cream, the sugarcane-based serving bowls say sustainability and the ice cream sandwich wrappers say handmade.

communicating the unquestionable romance of the Italian night sky. The client had wonderful reviews on the wine quality but had run into resistance in sales due to the packaging not feeling very premium and too expected or generic,” Schuemann adds.

The solution was to fashion a logo mark of a shimmering moon using tiny, hand-drawn stars stamped in gold foil and overprinted with three different inks to create varying depths of patina. “The final touch was to emboss them with dimension so they literally twinkle as light reflects off the bottle,” Schuemann says. The deep blue of the Italian night sky is echoed in the neck foil, bringing “a touch of the brand’s equity of blue into the new package.”

The multilayer paper stock used for the new label is distinctive and functional, incorporating an internal layer of plastic that helps the label retain its integrity in ice buckets and other wet environments. The label stock also is embossed with a custom texture that creates a rich, toothy surface.

Since introducing the new label, Luna Nuda has significantly increased its on- and off-premise distribution. Retailers such as Harris Teeter, Publix, Winn-Dixie, Whole Foods Market, Cost Plus World Market and ABC Fine Wine & Spirits, plus many restaurants, now sell the brand.

**Handmade in small batches**

For artisanal foods, packaging must effectively portray the product’s handmade quality. In many cases, packaging choices also reflect the artisan’s environmental commitment.

For example, at Ici Ice Cream (www.ici-icecream.com), Berkeley, Calif., all products are handmade in small batches using local, organic ingredients. The emphasis on sustainability carries through to the cups in which Ici serves ice cream and the packaging for its pre-packed products.

“When you talk about artisanal, high-end, high-quality products like Ici Ice Cream ... they want [packaging] that’s going to perform well and present their product in the best light. But they also want it to be green,” says Allen King, president of Excellent Packaging & Supply (www.excellentpackaging.com), Richmond, Calif.

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Ici with environmentally friendly packages and materials. These include ice cream sandwich wrappers; decorative cotton ribbon for boxes, bags and other containers; and shopping bags made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper.

BioMass also supplies Ici with bagasse (sugarcane-based) serving bowls and cups. Using this type of material instead of polystyrene foam or bleached paper emphasizes the products' handmade, back-to-nature persona. The cups tell customers "this is artisanal. The cow's out back, and the sugarcane just grew. It gives you that feeling," King says.

At the same time, the cups and packaging align with Ici's stylish image. Ice cream sandwiches are wrapped in a cellulose-based metallized film that's backyard compostable. The metallization gives the sandwiches a silvery look in the freezer case, and beads of frozen condensation on

## A TASTE FOR GLASS

Glass is often the packaging material of choice for high-end food products because of its aesthetics and its ability to protect organoleptic properties.

Both the beauty of glass and its inert, nonleaching aspect led Traders Point Creamery ([www.tpfororganics.com](http://www.tpfororganics.com)), Zionsville, Ind., to choose glass for all its products, including cottage cheese.

The company, a family-owned, artisanal dairy farm, also packages whole milk, chocolate milk, yogurt and spreadable cheeses in glass. Customers can recycle the packages or return them to Traders Point for reuse.

The creamery won a 2011 Clear Choice Award from the Glass Packaging Institute for its cottage cheese package, a wide-mouth 16-oz jar. Saint-Gobain subsidiary Verallia North America ([www.us.verallia.com](http://www.us.verallia.com)), Muncie, Ind., supplies the package, which launched commercially this past spring.



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the film add to the hand-crafted look and feel. Ici's artisans apply a pressure-sensitive label to each hand-wrapped sandwich to secure the film and to specify flavor.

#### Reclosable pasta bags

Jessica Volpe, owner of Chicago-based Pasta Puttana ([www.pastaputtana.com](http://www.pastaputtana.com)), also values sustainability. Her use of local organic ingredients in the hand production of flat and filled pastas, and her choice of reusable/recyclable packaging, reflect her environmental commitment.

Pasta Puttana sells its products in tamper-evident, reclosable bags printed with the brand's logo. Each 8-oz. bag of pasta is hand-packed and hand-stamped with the pasta's flavor, style of cut and expiration date.

The bags are made of "high-grade, food-quality, freezer-quality plastic," says Volpe. "It's recyclable, but it's not recycled. I really encourage people to keep the pouches and reuse them. My customers, for the most part, care about the environment. They're going to recycle or reuse" the bag.

In addition to being good for the planet, reuse is good for the Pasta Puttana brand. "It's to my benefit if someone keeps the pouch, puts some herbs in it and keeps it in the fridge. Every day, they open the fridge

Pairing chocolate with wine requires some instructions, so Brix Chocolate created a box that looks like a book. A wax-like seal on the side adds to the elegance.

and look at my logo and think about my pasta."

Plastic is a practical material for fresh pasta, protecting its flavor and texture better than a paper-based package could. And the

bags are transparent, so consumers can see the pasta before they buy. "I wanted people to look through the bag and see the product. It's colorful and beautiful," Volpe says. "A lot of times people eat with their eyes." 

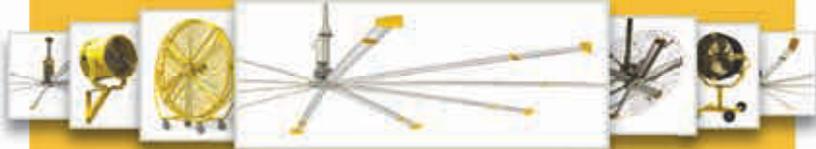


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