

TENTH ANNUAL PACKAGING ISSUE

WINES & VINES

THE VOICE OF THE WINE INDUSTRY

WWW.WINESANDVINES.COM

MAY 2009

Bottles Lighten Up

New models shed ounces, cents **32**

New Packaging
Products **38**

How to Print
Your Labels **46**

Packaging
Makeovers **54**

PLUS:
Soil Ripper
Deluxe **62**

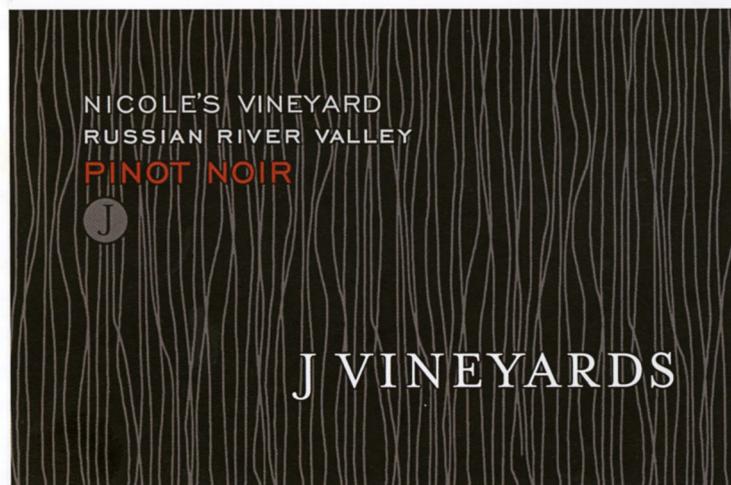
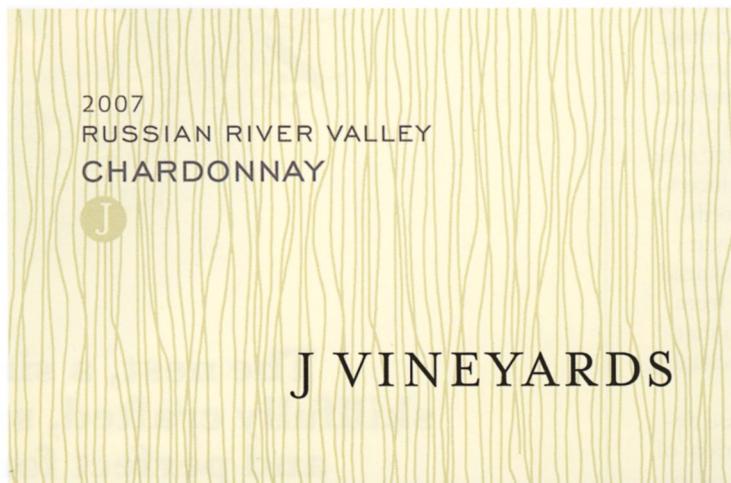
Tasting Rooms **72**

WINE EAST 77
Disease Control

Label Makeovers

How four wineries brightened their looks

By Suzanne Gannon



J Vineyards is straying from its well-recognized silkscreened design (left) to draw attention to its site-specific Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (right).

Many years ago, when I was working for an importer of Italian wines, we lost our top-selling Chianti brand to a competing importer and marketer. Suddenly we found ourselves in the midst of a mad scramble to replace tens of thousands of cases worth of business overnight.

The solution we devised, after much negotiation and consultation with our producers, distributors and investors, was to force-feed our distribution pipeline with our second line of Chiantis, beefing up production with a new entry-level D.O.C.G. tier. We reintroduced the

estate's existing Classico and Riserva wines in a new package that related to the new D.O.C.G. bottle in a way that presented the line as a family of retail-friendly wines that would pop on the shelf.

As if pulling off the production of an entirely new product in a few months' time was not enough of a feat, even more daunting was the fact that we had to compete with what had become, ironically through our own efforts in sales and marketing, an iconic label for Castello di Gabbiano: an eye-catching, multi-colored medieval Italian knight on horseback, a symbol that enjoyed substantially more consumer and trade recognition in the

Highlights

- Redesigning an established package is sometimes essential, but not without pitfalls.
- For a newer brand or an emerging region, a whole new approach may be your wisest move.
- Sometimes, successful elements can be retained, while minor tweaks can differentiate among a brand's tiers.

market than the brand name itself.

Still reeling from the loss of our flagship brand, I was tasked with developing not only the new labels, but also an entirely new image for the line that we hoped would inherit its predecessor's success. High stakes indeed that cost many a sleepless night.

Consulting with an Italian graphic designer familiar with our portfolio, and cognizant of how well the lone image of the horseman had served us, we concluded that we must find a single symbol that epitomized both the winemaker's hands-on approach to making wine, and the little forest in the Tuscan hills where his winery, Castello di Querceto, was located.

Enter the unicorn. For years the estate, consisting of a stone castle in an arbor of oaks and cypresses with separate cellars and a bottling line, had used a label with an intricate family crest, on top of which stood a rakish unicorn posing in profile. (Perhaps these four-legged creatures were believed to have roamed the property). After presenting a slew of options, the designer produced several versions of a highly stylized unicorn in two distinct two-color formats (one for Classico, one for Riserva) that evoked a distinctly handcrafted look. To distinguish the D.O.C.G., he designed a similarly wrought likeness of the castle itself.

For weeks, these labels--along with a few naked bottles and some rubber cement--accompanied me to every dinner party I attended and every restaurant I visited, my friends, colleagues and customers the unwitting participants in impromptu focus groups.

Though extremely low-tech in its approach, and utterly lacking in the organized consumer focus groups and labor-intensive quantitative analysis that today's wine marketers espouse, this story illustrates many of the factors wineries must consider when contemplating a brand makeover.

Setting your goals

What is it the winery is trying to accomplish, and can it be done with a simple refresh rather than a full re-design? Is there a brand message the package must communicate? If so, how? Is the package targeted at a specific consumer segment? Does the new look threaten existing business elsewhere in the portfolio? Will you trade up or down with the change? Does the proposed package entail so drastic a visual leap that

consumers are likely to be confused?

To gain some insight, we queried several vintners and winemakers who've either recently overseen wine packaging makeovers, tweaked existing labels, or introduced entirely new lines that must relate--or not--to other brands in their portfolios. Here's what we found:

Ever since the arrival in 2006 of winemaker George Bursick, a devotee of Russian River varietals, at J Vineyards, the Healdsburg sparkling house that long ago hit pay dirt with a paintbrush-stroke-like yellow letter J, was on an intensive march to prove the merits of its still-wine portfolio. Last fall, the winery released the latest vintages of its site-specific Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, for the first time in bottles featuring labels on which the J is noticeably absent. Ostensibly a gutsy move, the decision was at once nail-bitingly risky and thoroughly premeditated.

"In the marketplace, it became problematic that all the bottles, still and sparkling, looked alike," said Katherine Jarvis, spokesperson for J Vineyards, and president of Jarvis Communications, which handles its public relations.

J proprietor Judy Jordan, a geologist, was intent on promoting the still wines as the unique products of the more than 40 soil types that can be found in J's vineyards as a result of its seismic history.

"We've been putting so much emphasis on our varietal program--which now accounts for roughly 70% of our production--that we realized the package needed to represent what J is about right now, which is geology and terroir and the estate vineyards," Jarvis said.

The winery settled on an understated label by CF Napa Brand Design that emphasizes the grape and its vineyard in text, and subtly evokes the vineyard site's natural elements--stone, water, vines--with an embossed textural design. A tiny letter J is the previous label's only vestige.

When the message is bigger than a brand That point about communicating a message that might be larger than a particular wine brings to mind Jason Huntley, proprietor of the Walla Walla, Wash.-based Waters, who recently introduced Substance, a line of varietals priced between \$14 and \$18 suggested retail.

"The further east you go, the less familiar people are with Washington state, so we



Lisa Horbo Design of Santa Rosa, Calif., accented Kunde Family Estates' new labels with an earthy red nameplate—a nod to the volcanic soil at the vineyard, also pictured on the label.

needed an educational platform to sell our story to the emerging wine drinker," Huntley said.

The result was a series of labels by Boxwood of Seattle for varietals including Counoise, Cabernet Franc and Malbec, among others, featuring bold, periodic table-like abbreviations of each varietal name in black and white block type, i.e. Counoise is Co; Cabernet Franc is Cf and Malbec is Mb.

"The branding works synergistically with the Waters brand, which is known for Old World, European-styled wines," Huntley said. "By being less formal, and intriguing the new wine drinker who wants to learn, the Substance label demystifies the wine and doesn't overly focus on appellations or sub-appellations."

Wary of brand cannibalism, Huntley said the hidden benefit of Substance is that it provides the winery with a use for a surplus of high-quality fruit that may not stylistically match the pre-requisites of the 3,000-case Waters brand, which is priced between \$30 and \$125 per bottle.

Huntley knew he'd hit his mark when the package began inspiring a flurry of cheeky promotional ideas such as grunge garage



Ravenswood's new packaging differentiates its three tiers—Single Vineyard Designate, County Series and Vintners Blend (from left)—while keeping its logo of three interlocking ravens.

parties for wine lovers and edgy riffs like "Substance Abuse" for t-shirts.

Change can be good

Even the most compelling packages can run their course. Over time, change can be good. That's what fourth generation winegrower Marcia Kunde Mickelson discovered more than a year ago, when, with the winery's upcoming eighteenth harvest, it decided to make its label more relevant to today's consumers.

"Sustainability is the real deal at Kunde," said Mickelson, who is the communications manager for the Kenwood-based winery. "Our commitment to creating superb, environmentally friendly wines is front and center in every part of our business, and we wanted our packaging to reflect this."

After a year or more of strategizing and tinkering, the new Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc labels rolled out in March,

to be followed by Zinfandel, Chardonnay and Viognier this summer. The new packaging coincides with the arrival of winemaker Tim Bell.

Rather than the flashing the familiar green-marble-like color associated with the brand, Lisa Hobro Design of Santa Rosa, Calif., accented the new labels with a rustic-looking nameplate colored in an earthy red.

"The new design mirrors the red volcanic soil that is our signature," Mickelson said. "The new label is what you see from the road."

To acclimate the trade and consumers to its new look, Kunde will be providing neckers and case cards to retailers.

Asked whether she was concerned about losing some loyal consumers in the transition, Mickelson said, "They'll have to find us again. But not to move forward--and be

stagnant--would have been a disservice to the brand."

Refresher course

Sometimes, in the long life of a particular wine with a successful label, all that's needed is a subtle tweak--a color here, some lettering there--rather than a complete overhaul. Think of it as an eyebrow lift rather than a full facelift.

Such was the case for Ravenswood. In November, the Sonoma-based producer unveiled a new packaging strategy designed to differentiate its three tiers--Vintners Blend, County Series and Single Vineyard Designate--from one another. It was an ambitious undertaking for the 1 million-case producer, whose look had hardly changed since 1976, when artist David Lance Goines designed the memorable raven logo, known internally as the "three-raven-lockup"

"We took a step back and realized, this package is by no means broken," said Stefanie Jackel, brand manager for Ravenswood. "The equity in the brand is unparalleled in the market, despite the noise, so we did not have to reinvent it, we just had to refresh it."

After focus groups in Baltimore, Chicago and Los Angeles--and extensive surveying in its tasting room and offices--the winery, guided by Voicebox Creative of San Francisco, decided to retain many of the labels' successful elements, and in addition, put into place a hierarchy of visual cues--red for Vintners Blend (\$9.99 suggested retail); silver for County Series (\$15.99 to \$18.99); Black for Single Vineyard (\$35 to \$60)--to help consumers understand the differences among the tiers. The "stacked" arrangement of "Ravens" and "Wood," flanking the ravens, is a throwback to the brand's historic label, and the color palette has been consistent throughout its lifetime. The winery also adopted a short capsule for all three tiers, another Ravenswood trademark.

"This was absolutely our No.1 investment," said Jackel, who indicated that though it did not require millions of dollars, the repackaging effort absorbed a tremendous number of man-hours.

Man-hours? I know something about that. And the unicorn? The original labels we developed are long gone, though the mythical creatures do remain as an element in the brand's identity.