

BOTTLES AND LABELS ISSUE

# WINES & VINES

THE VOICE OF THE WINE INDUSTRY

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## SPECIAL REPORT

## BOTTLES AND LABELS

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first Bottles and Labels Issue of *Wines & Vines*. The special report that starts here and continues for 14 pages recognizes that wine packaging is experiencing an extremely rapid period of change, and tries to help winery owners, marketers and operations people better understand how to capitalize on the changes.

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## BOTTLES &amp; LABELS

## Best of the Bottles

We examine the elements of winning packaging

By Jane Firstenfeld

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Planning ahead, collaborating with suppliers and attention to detail are always key when adopting a new package.
- Use the entire 360° surface of a bottle to showcase your brand.
- The lowly shipping case is also worthy of design attention.
- Even older wineries can profit from fresh designs for new products.

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Wine packaging plays an important role in the industry and in *Wines & Vines*' editorial coverage, but this magazine does not normally rely on competitions for our reporting. Rather, we identify trends among our audience of wine-makers and suppliers in order to share technologies and techniques that bring effective wine packages to the shelves.

Earlier this year, the Beverage Testing Institute completed its most recent wine packaging judging. We followed up on their choices and spoke with the wineries that produced the most outstanding packages of 2012. The diversity of choices accurately reflects the options available to wineries of any size across the continent and beyond.

Founded in 1981 with the objective of producing fair and impartial wine reviews for consumers, BTI has since branched out into the spirits and beer industries as well.

The packaging adjudication began in 2004, according to Jerald O'Kennard, BTI director. "We wrap up the year with the packaging competition," O'Kennard said. "Instead of rating wines, we're judging the books by their covers."

As their last project for the year, the beverage testers sorted through an a collection of 50-60 standout packages they had accumulated throughout the year, O'Kennard explained. "We flag those bottles as they come in," he said. The criteria include all kinds of packaging. This year, bottles claimed the top spots.

**Historic winery adopts sexy new look**

Founded in 1890, Meier's Wine Cellars in Cincinnati, Ohio, is the state's oldest and largest winery, with distribution in 29 states. Almost shockingly modern, this is hardly your granny's wine label. Winner of BTI's



Best Bottle award, Meier's Sinful Sangria is encircled by graceful, scarlet-nailed hands in a sensuous, attention-grabbing grasp.

The full-wrap effect is accomplished with a PVC-coated bottle, according to Mary Beth Dunn, exterior relations manager for Meier's. "The material is PVC, steam-shrunk onto a glass bottle. This emulated the effect of a full bottle decoration."

Sinful Sangria is a new brand developed after Meier's was acquired about two years ago by Luxco, a spirits specialist. Unfortunately neither company can measure how much impact the package has on sales.

From a branding standpoint, Dunn said, "Working with the entire surface area of a bottle allows one to tell a brand story in three dimensions. I'm not saying this cannot be done with a single-face label, but being able to utilize more surface area on a bottle means you can expand the ways you reach your target consumer."

"From a manufacturing standpoint, being able to bypass conventional labeling allows us to bottle more and waste less," she added. Designing the package with Jeff Schmidt and Robert Jeffreys took about 10 months from inception to completion, Dunn said.

Luxco had previous experience with this packaging technique, used on the Yago Sangria from its spirits division. "We look at any way we can bring added value to a category. I feel that this method of labeling is inventive and fun, and would love to use it again," Dunn commented.

It's not about the means, she said, "as much as it is about branding and creating something completely different."

Anchor Glass supplied the bottle; Belmark the shrink sleeve. The screwcap comes from G3. The sleeve is applied as a cylinder and then steam heated until it contours the bottle, Dunn said. The UV protective coating helps to preserve the wine, and the sleeve is made of 100% recyclable plastic.

Meier's also shares this technology with private bottling clients through its Business Services division.

Dunn said of the packaging competition: "The BTI program helps give visibility. We appreciate being recognized. Luxco/Meier's believes in best practices and learning from the rest of industry. It's a core competence. "Sometimes you have to innovate."

#### Pomar Junction's boss look

Pomar Junction Vineyard & Winery in the Paso Robles AVA of California is smaller (6,000 cases per Wines Vines Analytics) and younger (founded 2002) than Meier's, but already it has earned a big reputation. The winery's bottle for its 2010 Reserve Late Harvest Viognier took BTI's award for Best Embossed Label.

While we expected to see an elaborate embossed paper label, BTI defines "embossed" differently: This is in fact a screen-printed bottle that reflects its \$85 per 500ml bottle price. Co-designed by Denise McClean of Mode Communications and Pomar Junction managing partner Matt Merrill, it also employs a wrap-around effect.

Merrill told BTI, "We had heard from our winemaking team that they thought they had an exceptional late-harvest Viognier that needed to be separate from our regular late-harvest Viognier. I knew that I needed to have an exceptional silk-screened bottle to match the amazing wine."

The wine recently earned Best in Class for the White Dessert Wines at the Central Coast Wine Competition. Of 94 cases originally produced, only 50 cases remain. "Since it is such a special wine, we have not tried to sell this outside the tasting room. It is 95% sold through the tasting room," Merrill said.

"We have another late-harvest Viognier called Amber Moonlight. The only reason we have this wine is because the harvest crew started picking and leaving the botrytis-affected grapes out of the picking bins. So we told them we did indeed want to include those clusters. We processed the grapes separately and kept them separate throughout the entire process."

Informed by the winemaker that the botrytis-infected wine was extremely spe-

cial, Merrill said, "I was actually somewhat disappointed. This meant that I had to figure out a whole new label that would be different than the other label."

**There is no difference in label approval time (for screenprinting). You simply treat the image the way as you would a paper label."**

—Lisa Erlich, Purple Wine Co.

Packaging design is always time consuming. "I wanted to create something that was as special as the wine, so I knew that it would take some time. I believe we had known around January of 2011 that we were going to bottle this lot with a different label, so I used that time to work on the label and let it evolve," Merrill recalled.

She worked with McClean, former tasting room manager at Meridian Winery, who is conveniently keeping her hand in the industry in by working Thursdays in the Pomar Junction tasting room. "If the tasting room was slow, I would go over ideas with her, and she would have something for me for the next week based on my input," Merrill said.

Pomar Junction takes its name and branding image from its home base in Templeton, Calif., a historic railroad hub. "My original idea was to have the train coming at you and wrap around the bottle. I wanted to utilize the possibilities of silk-screening the label, but Denise was having trouble making it happen and came up with having a train on the back that can be seen on the front," he said.

Everything about the bottle evokes quality. "We used different color inks—black, gray and a 22-karat gold. I thought the gold would help make it pop more and even reflect back some light," Merrill said.

The bottle, imported from France by TricorBraun WinePak, is appropriately named "Seduction." Adam Peltier of Peltier Glassworks did the screen printing and helped finish the artwork.

The closure is, Merrill said, "The highest grade cork that MA Silva produces for this wine and all of our reserve-level wines." This precisely designed package makes use of the cork to reinforce branding.

"The capsule is a wax treatment. We decided to get a gold that matched the gold



The full-wrap PVC decoration of Meier's Sinful Sangria (far left) snagged BTI's Best Bottle award, while Pomar Junction adopted a special package worthy of its 'exceptional' late-harvest Viognier (above).



on the label. We liked how the clear bottle shows the artwork on our cork, so we hand dip the bottle so that part of the cork can still be seen," Merrill said. "We have train tracks that wrap around the cork, along with some of our key terms for our brand."

#### Cryptic message

Another screen-printed bottle took the award for Graphic Design Embossed Label. Cryptic 2010 Red Wine, from Purple Wine Co. of Graton, Calif., is a classic design with a regal inspiration: The Cryptic wheel emblem printed in metallic gold was inspired by a "cipher machine" bearing the coat of arms of France's King Henri II.

The 15,000 cases of the original 2010 vintage hit the market in August 2012 and are already sold out. "We're now into the 2011 vintage," said Lisa Ehrlich, vice president/marketing at Purple. Cryptic's suggested retail price is \$16 per bottle, all sold through Purple's distributor network.

"We had a very strong response from the restaurant trade," Ehrlich said. Purple stoked the enthusiasm with a large format, 3-liter bottle for display, which helped spark curiosity."

Purple produces more than 400,000 cases annually; Cryptic is one of more than a dozen distinct brands. Ehrlich discussed how the screen-print process differs from paper labeling, starting with the essential label approvals.

"There is no difference in label approval time. You simply treat the image the same way as you would a paper label—but you do need to show an image of how the finished bottle will look. We've had experience with this before," she said.

"It doesn't really take longer, in theory. The screen printers who work with the wine industry have excellent in-house designers who can translate a paper label concept to screen-printing. But I think it works best when the design comes from a place where you have screen printing in mind from the start."



## SCREEN-PRINTING TIPS FROM A PRO

If a label costs 20-30 cents per bottle, that same design converted into a screen print could cost 35-60 cents per bottle, depending on the number of colors and type of inks," said Lisa Ehrlich, vice president/marketing at Purple Wine Co. "So the decorating cost can be 25%-50% more than a paper label."

Since screen-printed bottles come to the bottling line ready to go, with no need for sometimes-tricky label application, the process does save money in production, Ehrlich pointed out, "since the screen-printed bottles run faster and more efficiently on the bottling line."

Ehrlich offered a few more considerations for those pondering a change. "Screen printing requires more planning, is more time-sensitive and less flexible than a paper label. It's necessary to factor in additional lead time—three months ideally—ensuring that the glass is purchased in time to allow the bottles to be printed before the bottling date."

This pre-planning requires close collaboration with glass suppliers and coordinating delivery to the bottle decorators. In periods of high demand, the decorators may need more lead time. "If wineries wait until the last minute, their production run might not happen in time," Ehrlich cautioned.

"Finally, there is limited flexibility. With a paper label, if you decide to bottle less or more wine than planned, you simply don't use the labels—or ask for an additional label run from the printer. With silkscreen, whatever number of bottles get printed are the number you have. If you don't have enough, you'll need to scramble to get more glass decorated in time. If you have too much decorated glass, you have to discard it if it's vintage dated. With all these factors to consider, the final decision is whether the impact of a silkscreen design outweighs the costs. For Cryptic, we knew from the start that screen printing was the way to go," Ehrlich concluded.

J.F.

Working with Napa's Bergin Glass Impressions, "Cryptic was designed with screen printing in mind," Ehrlich said. "Our team drew on the experience of our designer along with the skill of the in-house designer at Bergin to make the concept come to life."

The package looks expensive for a moderately priced wine, and that's not just dazzle from the 24-karat gold ink. "Indeed, it costs more to produce a screen printed bottle than a paper label," Ehrlich explained.

Ehrlich said that "flamingo red" was the "color of the year," but she

and her collaborator, Paul Morales of San Francisco, Calif.-based Onyx Design, chose the name "blood-orange" for their blazing polylaminate capsule from Maverick in Ukiah, Calif.

#### Divining design

BTI did not overlook more traditional labels in its decision process. The Divining Rod 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon, a new label from Napa's venerable C. Mondavi & Family, combines quirky and traditional, earning the Creativity Gold award for paper labels.

"We needed a label that was unlike any other," said Elaine Mellis, director of public



PHOTO COURTESY OF BERGIN GLASS

The packaging on Purple Wine Co.'s Cryptic 2010 red blend elicited a strong response from the restaurant trade.

relations. "It needed to communicate the magic, mystery and history of water witching. It needed to grab consumers' attention and inspire them to ask, 'what's the story?' We wished to open a dialogue with consumers and begin telling that story."

With her first design for C. Mondavi, Chanda Williams perfectly hit the requirements, Mellis said. For this new brand, the process started about six months prior to bottling. For the first vintage of some 17,000 cases, (retailing at \$15.99 for Chardonnay; \$17.99 for Cabernet) a neck-hanger tag carried a quick response (QR) code on the label. Future bottlings will include the QR on the back label, directing purchasers to C. Mondavi's mobile site, which continues to evolve with the brand story.

The face stock is an aged-looking Liso Crudo, applied with cold glue. Again, planning ahead was vital. "Because the labels were to be sheet fed, the Technikote had to order special from Argentina so that it would not have the pressure-sensitive material on the back of the paper. This required a much longer timeline to receive the paper," Mellis recalled. Ben Franklin (now Tapp) handled the special order and printed the labels.

#### A foreign affair

Covering the North American wine industry is a full-time endeavor for *Wines & Vines*, so it's rare that imported brands make it to our pages. BTI, however, gave its gold in Best Paper Label design to Indaba 2012 Chenin Blanc from South Africa, so we contacted Courtney Luick, communications manager at Cape Classics in New York, for the backstory.

Indaba's Chenin Blanc is a simple looking bottle with a screwcap. The whole line retails in the U.S. and Canada for \$11.99 per bottle. The package is representative of Indaba's 2012 rebranding.

"At the core, the Indaba brand is proudly South African," Luick said. "Cape Classics set out to design a package that echoes that sentiment. The new brand design is reflective of the rich diversity of the Western Cape's floral kingdom: The smallest, yet most diverse of the six plant kingdoms in the world. The colors chosen for the varieties are based on what you see in the Cape: slightly muted hues, the way the light falls on the mountains, that sun-faded effect caused by the strength of the African sun."

BTI's O'Kennard noted that the judging panel was impressed by the package's

sustainability. Luick commented: "The new brand image also draws on the region's commitment to sustainability. As recycling is a social priority in South Africa, we selected recycled and biodegradable—as well as pH-neutral (acid-free)—paper. We also decided to use minimal coloring, and the bottles are screwcap."

The Indaba brand launched in the United States in 1996, shortly after South Africa transitioned to a democratic republic. "Indaba" is the



C. Mondavi wanted to communicate the process of water witching with its label for The Divining Rod (above). South African winery Indaba adopted colors found in the landscape of its native country for the award-winning label at left.

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## PACKAGING

Zulu word for “a meeting of the minds,” or a traditional gathering of tribal leaders for sharing ideas. According to its website, “The brand was created as a celebration of the democratization process in South Africa, and from its inception the wines have conveyed the spirit of South Africa to American consumers.”

### Best-case scenario

An essential component of the wine-selling process, wine shipper cartons rarely are recognized in packaging competitions, but BTI bought the case for Cecchetti Wine Co.'s Austerity 2011 Proprietary Red brand.

Most notably, despite the name, this is not a stripped-down brown cardboard carton. Rather, it's a sleek black package with gold stamping (obviously, BTI is attracted to shiny things). According to BTI, president/owner Roy Cecchetti challenged CF Napa Brand Design with his concept: “Create a new wine brand named Austerity that looks like a million bucks, tastes like a million bucks but doesn't cost a million bucks.”

He wanted a package that was the antithesis of the name itself. “These wines had to



look and feel as if they would deliver luxurious taste at a modest price.” The tag line, “Wines of the highest discipline,” promises wines of a value “far beyond their affordable price tag.”

Dave Schuermann at CF Napa also created the complementary bottle. Cecchetti bottled 5,400 cases of Austerity, retailing at \$16.99. Printed directly on a corrugated cardboard box with a “state-of-the-art press,” Cecchetti said, “The printing application allows the

A far cry from traditional kraft paper or white boxes, cases of Cecchetti Wine Co.'s Austerity are works of art in themselves.

fine detail of the logo to be well defined on a black background.” Cecchetti already is using a similar process for his Exitus brand, he said.

Although it's more expensive than a generic case shipper, he noted, “In today's highly competitive wine market, you need to get on the floor for brand awareness and to increase sales. A branded shipper with attractive artwork will compel the wholesaler/retailer to display the wines on the floor.”

Whether a century-old winery or totally new brand, just as wine changes with every vintage, packaging evolves with technology and the market. Consumers' eyes are drawn to new concepts. A packaging award may not increase your sales or your price-point, but a refreshed look may indeed bring in new buyers.

The deadline for BTI's 2013 packaging competition is Dec. 1, 2013. Contact BTI for details. [WAY](#)

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