

Designers Take On Label Trends

Larry Walker

The most obvious and arguably the most important part of the wine package is the label. The label has to stand out on the shelf—that's the obvious part. It also should reflect the wine in the bottle, which is not the same thing as simply catching the eye.

In a survey taken near the end of 2005, some 36% of U.S. wine drinkers said that they are confused by wine labels. More than half, 51%, said that labels on imported wines are especially difficult to read. In a response that may send wine marketers right 'round the bend, 75% of wine consumers said that even when they really like a wine, they sometimes can't remember the name.

The telephone survey was conducted between Nov. 20 and Dec. 4 of last year by ICR, and international survey research firm based in Media, Pa. Results were released by Peter Click, the founder and CEO of the Click Wine Group. Click was an early leader in bringing Australian wines into the United States, and also introduced the very successful Fat Bastard wine into the U.S. in 1999. (That's the one with the cute little hippo on the label.) It may surprise you to learn that Fat Bastard is now the fifth best selling French brand in the U.S.

Slightly more than half of those surveyed, 51%, said they find wines with humorous labels appealing, and 81% said they want labels that are clear and easy to understand.

Okay, that's simple enough: Design a humorous, appealing label that is clear and easy to understand. Wines & Vines did an informal e-mail survey of the top label designers in the U.S. to get their take on appealing wine labels that are easy to understand.

Keeping the ICR survey results in mind, we asked four simple questions:

- What will be the hot new label trends for the next few years?
- How has wine label design changed in the past decade?
- Are we just about finished with cute animals?
- How does a wine label define the wine in the bottle?

Here are some of the answers we received:

Paula Sugarman, Sugarman Design Group, Sacramento, Calif.

On the question of trends, Sugarman noted that the technical process of pressure-sensitive labels has changed the design process. "More labels are pressure sensitive now. They don't take an emboss as well as the old sheetfed process, so there aren't as many options."

She added that the Australians have changed the way we look at wine labels, cute animals and all. "I think those labels are really designed for a younger market which has little knowledge of vintage wines. They are shopping on price and label."

Sugarman said that designers are going to have to work harder. "There is so much visual noise when you walk into BevMo (Beverages & More!). It's our job to create a label that attracts attention, has brand equity, and is also memorable. Once we do get a consumer to pick up a wine and buy it, they have to remember the label. That's where the animals came in. But now there are so many. We have to look for other ways to attract attention. There are brands coming out with more concept-oriented labels, more like an advertising image which has a catchy and memorable concept—labels like 7 Deadly Zins. People will remember them because of the clever play on words."



Sugarman Design Group's Paula Sugarman designed the Bogart package to tell a story about the wine in the bottle.

Getting straight to the heart of the matter, Sugarman said, "It's always our job to tell a story about the wine and what's in the bottle. High-end wines have done it for years. That should be the next trend, to get back to the essence of what's in the bottle and tell the story."

Conclusions: not so easy. Trends are getting harder to spot as the market becomes more niche-driven. Evolving technology is also changing the nature of label design. Consumers like labels that tell a story, but you have to tell it fast and simple.

Oh yeah, those cute animals: don't write them off yet. Just this week I received a sample of the inaugural Pinot Noir from The Little Penguin, imported by Foster's from Australia. You don't have to be told what the label looks like. Cute? I'll say. ■