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What's Popping in Sparkling Wine Packaging

As more wineries add a sparkler to their portfolios, they also aim to have that bottling stand out

by L.M. Archer

According to a 2017 Nielsen study, 71% of consumers don't know what they want when they walk into a store looking to buy some wine.

Nielsen concluded packaging is of vital importance to persuade consumers to buy a particular brand. And as sparkling wine continues to grow in popularity in the United States, those same consumers are now more likely to be looking for a bottle of bubbles. Innovative and attractive packaging could help convince them to pick your brand off the shelf.

For Maria Stuart of R. Stuart & Co. in McMinnville, Ore., the ultimate goal of any wine label is to create a personal connection between the customer and the wine. "When a wine speaks to a person, you've got a customer for life," Stuart said. Stuart worked with designer Andrea La Rue at Nectar Graphics in McMinnville to create the Bubbly and Rosé d'Or sparkling wine labels.

La Rue isn't the only designer delighting sparkling wine makers. Carrie Higgins of CRUSH Creative Packaging, the wine label division of Taylor Made Labels in Lake Oswego, Ore., is a 25-year wine industry packaging veteran. Higgins' tagline is, "There's drama in a package," and she said most clients venturing into sparkling wine ask the same questions: "How do I take my existing brand and create something lovely that's different? How do I make it stand out from my still wines?"

Higgins consults with clients on a whole host of technical aspects specific to sparkling wine, such as paper stock, embellishments and what she calls the "sparkle factor" - which makes a wine stand out on the shelves.

"A couple of years ago, when sparkling wines were just sort of peeking out in Oregon," Higgins said, "people were pretty conservative. "It was hard almost to tell it was a sparkling wine. It was almost like they were afraid of it, because we didn't really do sparkling wine in Oregon, right? To me, it's super fun and exciting to see people taking chances. ... This is your time to take a little risk, get a little funky, be creative, have some fun."

KEY POINTS

Unique labels and other elements help convey what's unique about a sparkling wine.

Traditional Champagne corks and crown caps are popular.

Canning sparkling wine is a cost-effective and trendy way to market.

Recently, Higgins collaborated on the packaging for a new Jackson Family Wines sparkling project called Lytle-Barnett. Higgins printed the labels in Lake Oswego, package design originated with Andrea La Rue of Nectar Graphics, and Radiant Sparkling in McMinnville handled the bottling.

"This is a stand-alone sparkling wine project," Higgins said. "It's three different sparkling wines being released all at one time, and they're using a paper that was specifically developed for sparkling wine - called Sparkling Asti by Fasson. The paper manufacturers are now actually making papers geared towards this fun sparkling-wine-specific market."

Higgins also sees more "ice bucket" tested papers, die cuts and adhesives for sparkling wines. "Paper, adhesive, varnishes - you have to make sure you're marrying a wet strength paper and a wet stick adhesive," she said. "Those two components must sync up, and they're very different. That's on the end line. But oftentimes there are conditions on the bottling line end of it as well."

Condensation and overflow can occur during bottling, so some wineries prefer to label afterward. Higgins advised doing some research on the bottling provider, its equipment, the bottling environment, the machinery, who will be applying the labels and when. "Those are critical questions to ask because if you don't, you could really risk failure, and could be looking at a reprint - more expense - if you don't have those discussions up front."

Heather Chartrand, chief operating officer of Watermark Labels in Lodi, Calif., concurs. "We are seeing a trend with traditional wineries adding a sparkling varietal to their product offering," she said. "Our customers have taken a strong interest in the metallic silver material because it adds a design element that sets their sparkling label apart from the other wine labels."

Watermark won the 2018 Avery Dennison Wine by Design contest at the Unified Wine & Grape Symposium in Sacramento, Calif., for design innovation utilizing Avery Dennison materials. Watermark garnered the award for its design for a sparkling rosé produced by Van Ruiten Family Winery in Lodi. The packaging included Fasson 56# MaxFlex Bright Silver paper.

"For the Van Ruiten project, we used a textured and elegant bright white felt material combined with embossing and foil to communicate the Van Ruiten brand message of classic design and quality wine," Chartrand said. "A silver capsule added continuity to the silver foil embellishments on the label and complemented the blush color of the wine."

Augmented reality and laser cutting

Paragon Labels in Petaluma, Calif., offers a whole new dimension in labels with augmented-reality features that are activated with a smartphone app available for free for either Apple or Android devices. Paragon owner Jason Grossman said the labels can play a short video or animation and then provide users the option to purchase, read tasting notes or sign up for a newsletter. The app also allows users to capture an image of the video and share it on social media, email and text with their friends. "Since Treasury did such a good job with their 19 Crimes label, app people get the value of this now," Grossman said. "It's a selling tool, not a gimmick. Because how many wineries don't want to get a direct connection with a consumer? They all want that. Let's face it. And this allows them to do it."

St. Helena, Calif.-based Boisset Collection is using Out the Bottle labels for its Buena Vista wines, including the 2015 The Count red blend. While not a sparkling wine, the Boisset blend is one of a just a few U.S. brands that will be packaged with an augmented-reality label, which will feature a textured black crocodile pattern for the black label, gold foil writing and a photo of the famed Count Agoston Haraszthy on the front. When activated, the photo of Haraszthy will begin talking about the winery and wine. "This interactive label technology is another way that we are continuing to champion the historic past of Buena Vista - but now with a very futuristic technology that we think has the potential to transform (the sales end of) the wine industry, just as Haraszthy did by being a pioneer of California wine," said Boisset Collection communications manager Megan Long.

Paragon also boasts what it claims is the world's only Laserweb laser printer, capable of creating intricate, multidimensional labels, which has attracted interest from many sparkling wine producers. "We're getting a lot of interest (from sparkling wine producers), because if you have laser-cut labels, you're one of the few on the shelves," Grossman said.