

Vineyard & Winery Management

JULY - AUGUST 2016

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Annual Suppliers Guide

Jean-Charles Boisset designed the bottle and gift set for The Surrealist, a high-end Napa Valley Bordeaux blend, with an eye for making memories.

BY DANIELLE BEURTEAUX

THE ART OF THE BOTTLE

Wine producers are commissioning imaginative bottles for high-end, limited-edition wines destined for high prices and loyal members.

What began as a dream to recreate memorable wine moments resulted in a very unique wine bottle design for a high-end Napa Valley Bordeaux blend called The Surrealist, one of Boisset Collection's JCB by Jean-Charles Boisset wines. "I'm a true surrealist at heart," says Boisset, referring to a central inspiration for his designs. "It's very unique in the wine world to do something different."

"The Surrealist" bottles feature an attached medallion that's plated in 24-carat gold and features two profiles that frame each side of a central chalice, which is covered in crushed Swarovski rubies and diamanté crystals. After the wine is consumed, you can replace the bottle's glass stopper with an optional, accompanying Baccarat crystal stopper if you purchase the gift set. To encourage reuse,



Boisset designed a golden pewter funnel that can be purchased as an accessory to the bottle, which makes transferring liquid into the bottle easier. The bottle, which is made from clear glass, comes in a red velvet bag for protection from light, and the bottle is available on its own or as part of a gift set. The expense, says Boisset, wasn't a primary concern. "For me, the cost is kind of immaterial. I want to create something absolutely surrealistic."

Not all wine producers will go to the lengths that Boisset did to create a memorable bottle that will appeal to the higher end of the wine market. But more producers are choosing distinctive and, often, customized bottles to offer a unique product. Just don't expect to see them on local store shelves — many are created for limited-production wines for loyal customers.

EVOKING A MEMORY

For Boisset, bejeweling a bottle came from a long-held ambition to create something more akin to a piece of art. "A label is what we've been doing forever," he says. "What about adorning a bottle with a gorgeous piece of jewelry? It's a celebration of elegance and style; a moment. I started having fun drawing jewelry pieces I would want on a bottle," he says regarding his inspiration to make it happen.

Today's high-end wine producers are looking for bottles that are unique and worthy of the wine inside. After the recession, wineries didn't want to spend money on special or custom bottles, says Erica Harrop, founder and president of Napa, Calif.-based Global Package. There was a challenging combination of back inventory, price freezes and successive years with large harvests — but now that trend is being reversed.

Wine producers are looking for interesting bottles and custom molds, and they're taking inspiration from others' creative packaging, says Harrop. "I've seen an authentic interest in what other companies are doing," she says. "It's not about taking market share; it's about saying, 'I want to be part of the new generation of creativity.'" And that creativity is being taken to new levels with bottles transformed into collectible works of art in their own right.

AT A GLANCE

- ✦ Wineries are indulging flights of fancy to create one-of-a-kind bottles.
- ✦ Most are intended for rare and limited-release wines.
- ✦ Collectors are willing to pay thousands for these unique pieces.
- ✦ The bottles are designed to be kept as objects in their own right.

Michael Bergin, president of Napa, Calif.-based Bergin Glass Impressions, which provides etching and screen-printing services, says once the economy improved, the company's etching division experienced a dramatic spike in demand, particularly large formats. "I always gauge the overall health of the wine industry by the level of etching we do, and it's been consistently getting stronger since 2012," he says. "Because [etched bottles] are expensive, it means their customer base is feeling confident about the economy and jobs and are looking for unique, new items."

Demand has also been up for Etched Images' services, also in Napa, Calif., which has been offering hand etching and painting for wine bottles since 1992, predominantly for clients in Napa and Sonoma counties. Most clients order once per year, but some as many as three or four times, and the size of the orders are increasing, says president and co-founder Stu McFarland. The company's 18 employees are busy all year long, he says. "It used to be January and February were really slow, but it's changed to the point it just doesn't stop."

Because each job is done completely by hand and can involve a substantial amount of time per bottle, each commission is custom-quoted. The company etches around 16,000 bottles per year. "One artwork style might take 10 minutes of sandblasting to etch the label into glass, while a more complicated design of the same label might take 25 minutes," says McFarland.

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An etched bottle of Darius II costs \$1,500 for the 3 L format, and up to \$6,500 for the 9 L format, says Boscarino. The large formats are very limited production.

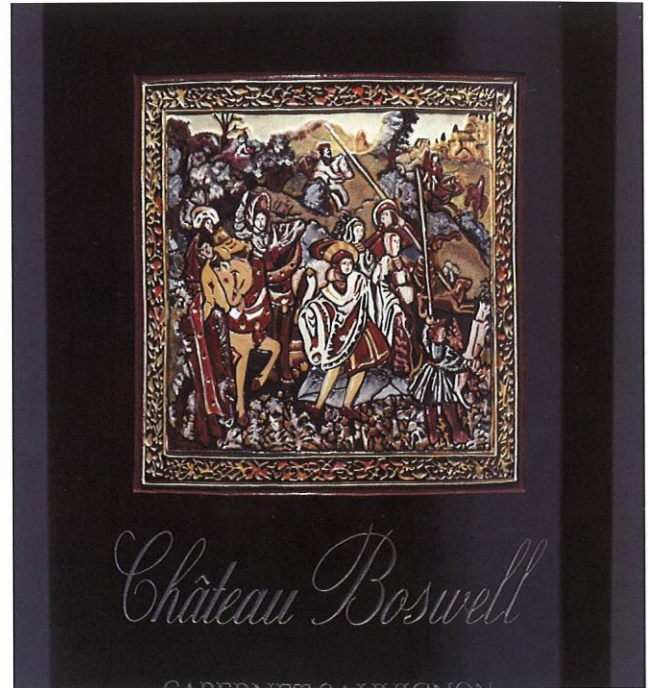
MEMBERS ONLY

Many of these special bottles are destined for loyal customers, members-only clubs and sales accounts, and are often sold via preorder. (A photograph of a mock-up bottle is often used to promote the sale, says Bergin.) At JCB, there are only 1,200 bottles of the current The Surrealist 2013 vintage; prices begin at \$350. They're available at JCB tasting lounges and salons in Napa and Sonoma counties, in San Francisco at the Ritz-Carlton, as well as online — but will be limited to members programs once there are fewer available. The Darius II, on the other hand, is a member-exclusive release, says Boscarino, available only through the winery's First Offering membership.

Bergin Glass Impressions counts among its clients Chateau Boswell in St. Helena, Calif., for which it created a design for a special edition Tapestry Cabernet Sauvignon, which cost between \$1,200 to \$1,300 per bottle to etch and paint. Another is Realm Cellars in Napa, Calif., whose Beckstoffer To Kalon Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon features an etched eye and is offered biannually to the producer's mailing list members. Another cli-

ent wanted a collage of imagery created from 30 years of graphics from Playboy magazine. The bottles were intended for special accounts and customers, and Bergin Glass Impressions' work cost from \$300 to \$1,800 for each piece.

Shafer Vineyards in Napa, Calif., has Bergin Glass Impression etch approximately 130 3 L and 30 6 L formats of its Hillside Select wine every year with a reproduction of the paper label; the bottles are donated to various charity auctions across the country.



Bergin Glass Impressions counts among its clients Chateau Boswell in St. Helena, Calif., for which it created a design for a special edition of the winery's Tapestry Cabernet Sauvignon.

CA

"He even answered a phone call at midnight one evening when I forgot how to program the press!"

"They've become friends and treat us like partners. I recommend them to everyone I know."

*Seth Martin
Perissos Vineyards
Burnet, TX*

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The appeal of a unique, hand crafted bottle is very attractive for collectors, says Bergin. "It's a big, beautiful statement when they have a dinner party for 12 of their friends and they uncork one of these bottles," he says. "There's not only a fabulous wine inside, but they're getting an art piece."

Boisset, who, apart from the Surrealists, counts fashion designers like Oscar de la Renta, Alexander McQueen and Yves Saint Laurent among his inspirations, thinks the wine world should embrace creativity to craft a package worthy of the wine within. "[The bottle] should be creative and have a correlation between what's inside and outside," he says.

Danielle Beurteaux is a freelance writer based in Brooklyn, N.Y., who writes about drinks, business, investing and technology for national magazines and websites.

Comments? Please e-mail us at feedback@vwmmmedia.com.