

WINES & VINES

Wine Labels for a Sensory Experience

From technology to texture, packaging with a purpose is now more important than ever

by Stacy Briscoe

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#WIYG (What's in your glass) and how one celebrates #WW (wine Wednesday) or #TT (thirsty Thursday) are the new conversations in wine.

People are engaging with fellow #winelovers and sharing #longdistancecheers via Twitter chats and #winestagrams every day. Social media has brought the world of wine closer together, while at the same time it's opening up a much wider variety of wines for the average consumer to choose from. As wine conversations have evolved, so has wine packaging.

As the competition for consumer attention is growing fiercer than ever, wine packaging is that much more important.

David Schuemann, owner and creative principal for CF Napa Brand Design in Napa, Calif., says quality packaging accomplishes three things: It invites product trial, speaking to the consumers in a specific, engaging way; it reinforces the quality of the product, making consumers feel they're purchasing something of value; and it promotes product recall, giving consumers something they'll remember and repurchase. "The toughest part is for companies to boil it down to one stake in the ground," Schuemann said. "A lot of packaging tries to do too much."

He stresses the importance for wineries to tell their stories in digestible snippets consumers can easily relate to, remember and pass along.

Telling the longer story with tech

With the innovation of augmented-reality (AR) labels popularized by Treasury Wine Estates (TWE) brands' 19 Crimes, Gentleman's Collection, Beringer Vineyards, Chateau St. Jean Winery & Vineyards, and the recent addition, Walking Dead Wines, there's now an option for wineries to tell a longer, more detailed story.

"We asked ourselves, 'How can we tell our stories more eloquently?'" said Michelle Terry, chief marketing officer for TWE. Terry said that she and her team working in the Bay Area "keep their fingers on the pulse" of what's new in tech, and when they saw AR was available in the tech realm, got together with their creative agency to see what they could do to bring their wine labels to life.

Terry said AR has been the driver for the 19 Crimes brand, which has seen double-digit growth since the new labels hit shelves in July 2017, growing it to a 1.5 million-case brand. "And the Walking Dead demand has exceeded expectations," she said, adding that both the Blood Red Blend and Cabernet Sauvignon are now on allocation because they've sold so strongly.

While the 19 Crimes criminal confessions and Walking Dead fighting zombies are geared toward entertainment appeal, Terry said, TWE recognizes such a fantastic approach isn't appropriate for all brands. AR for Chateau St. Jean is more informative and educational, featuring narration by winemaker Margo Van Staaveren speaking about the estate vineyards. "The elements in the label trigger an experience," Terry said; the proper experience is chosen based on both the brand and target audience.

The Living Labels app, specifically created for TWE AR labels, has been downloaded by more than 1.3 million users with more than 200,000 videos of the app experience shared across social media, and it is ranked No. 41 for top non-paid apps in the food and beverage industry.

"Packaging has always been on the forefront of consumer choice, but with social media it's increased. The first point of contact with a wine can now be online," Schuemann said when asked about the importance of wine labels evolving to become more "social media friendly."

But as Terry said, "The proof is in the pudding. People are buying again. AR has been successful packaging, but we're always making sure that the quality of the wine delivers. The real engagement with wine happens when it's drunk."

TWE plans to roll out AR experiences for Sterling Vineyards and Matua, as well as partner with another popular TV series, which Terry wouldn't divulge. When asked about wine brands outside of TWE glomming onto the AR trend, she said, "We haven't seen anything yet, but we expect others to come."

Engage with more than just graphics

"I saw this technology three or four years ago," said Jason Grossman, president and CEO of Paragon Label in Petaluma, Calif. "My other company makes stickers, and someone presented the idea of implementing augmented reality into my stickers." But, he said, he thought this new technology would be better suited for the wine market.

In 2014, the programmer who approached Grossman quoted him \$100,000 to create the app that would provide the AR wine labels. "Most of my clients are medium to small wineries who wouldn't be able to buy into that cost," he said.

Two years later, in 2016, Grossman met his current app developer through a licensing agency. Together, the two developed a more affordable and, Grossman feels, a more well-rounded app called Out the Bottle.

"When we created Out the Bottle, I thought, 'Let's make this a cost-effective, industrywide app,'" Grossman said. With his app, customers can experience the AR of any one of his clients without having to download an additional brand-specific app. "It's just one app and go," he said.

Conversely, TWE's Living Label app is downloaded with the original 19 Crimes experience already installed, but to experience AR for other labels, users must download separate mini-apps within the larger Living Labels app.

Like TWE's, Grossman's current portfolio ranges from somewhat silly (such as a talking bear on the label of Haraszthy Family Cellars) to informative (meet the winemaker of Mazzocco). What makes his app different is what consumers can do after the AR experience. "With my app, after the glitz you can go on and learn more about the product," Grossman said.

Inside the Out the Bottle AR experience screen are three buttons that can link to wherever the winery wants them to - tasting notes, recipes, the e-commerce page. What's more, these links are malleable in the hands of the wineries through a back-end portal where they can manipulate how those links function at any time.

Grossman said he added this ability to appeal to the more discerning wine consumer, the folks who don't necessarily care what a wine label can do so much as how much information it can provide.

Grossman is thankful for TWE successfully paving the way and popularizing the new technology. He said that since the launch of TWE's 19 Crimes AR labels, he's been getting calls from clients finally interested in the tech he pitched years ago. He's currently working on AR labels for nine wineries and a few wine clubs, all California-based, none of which he would name. "I just want my wineries to tell their stories to their consumers," he said. "They have no voice when they're out on the shelf."

Tech versus touch

AR isn't the only way to achieve mass-market appeal. "There's an undercurrent about feel," said Jim Sheibley, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Wausau Coated Products in Wausau, Wis. "We like to ask, 'How does this feel in my hand?' and 'Does this feel different in my hand?'"

Textural experience is just as important as visual appeal, according to Sheibley. He mentions wood veneer on beer bottles and pleather on barrel-aged spirits. One of his clients, a nationally branded Kentucky bourbon brand, was able to increase the per-bottle price by \$10 (taking it from a \$50 price to \$60, according to Sheibley) and "still exceeded sale expectations" due to its textural labeling transformation. "If there's a way to move a brand to the upscale market without completely changing the identity, it's with labeling," Sheibley said.

Wausau Coated's newest innovation geared toward the wine industry is its Marquis Product, a velveteen-like material. Manufactured mostly in rich, royal reds and purples, the product has been picked up predominantly by clients producing sparkling wines or premium red wines. Consumers saw this on the shelves last year when Raymond Vineyards, part of Boisset Collection, released its 40th Anniversary 2014 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. "We're continuing the velvet

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— Jim Sheibley, executive vice president of sales and marketing, Wausau Coated Products

label with subsequent vintages of that wine," said Megan Long, communications manager for Boisset Collection, "and we're incorporating different-colored velvet labels with other wines in the Napa Valley Reserve Tier - a Merlot and Chardonnay - which will be out either later this year or early 2019."

For the more casually consumed wines, namely white wines and rosés, Wausau Coated has a line of paper called Ever Opaque. Though the material has the look and feel of a conventional wine label, it includes a film over the top to support the embellishment of embossing or foil-detailing without damage to the paper.

The real appeal: Ever Opaque is exactly that - it remains wrinkle- and bubble-free and, yes, opaque, even when chilled in an ice bath, as many white and rosé wines are. So consumers can #roséallday and still have Instagram-worthy bottle shots.