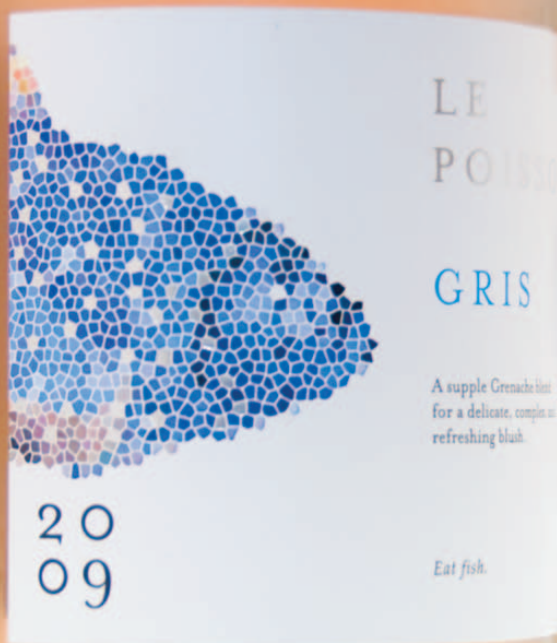


The award-winning label for Le Poisson Gris incorporates design elements on the back label as well as the front label.



By Deborah Parker Wong

# Winning Wine Labels

Award-winning labels set standards for design and technology

## AT A GLANCE

- Design awards can be used to convey a brand's ability to sell through and to reposition products that have been rebranded.
- When targeting a specific demographic, packaging will perform better if it succeeds in making an emotional connection with the chosen audience.
- Successful packaging design doesn't require elaborate production techniques.
- Quick response codes on back labels give consumers instant access to product information on their smart phones.

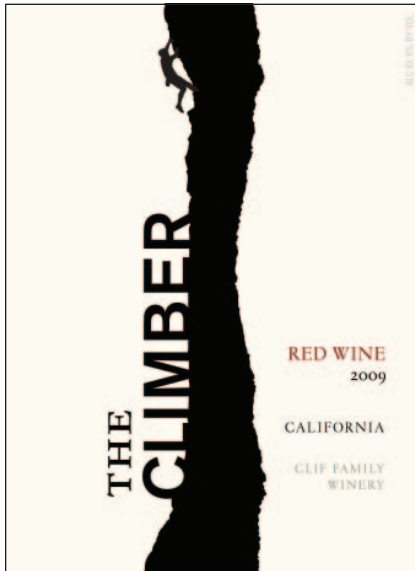
**W**ith the steady proliferation of domestic wine brands, label design can be a competitive advantage that helps speed the adoption of a new brand. It can also be used to improve the earning power of an existing brand.

Thanks to the innovative use of printing technologies, wine labels are no longer confined to two-dimensional squares of paper; designers are creating three-dimensional labels using the bottle itself as their canvas and incorporating graphics that can instantly connect consumers to information about a brand via mobile technology. These trends and others can be seen hard at work in the award-winning packaging designs that have been singled out for recognition by wine industry and packaging design competitions.

## VALUE IN RECOGNITION

"Design and packaging awards do have merit," said David Schuemann, creative director at CF Napa Brand Design, whose powerful black and white label for Clif Family Winery's zinfandel-based blend, "The Climber

Red," won the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition's 2011 label contest.



Clif Family Winery's "The Climber" label took top honors at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition's 2011 label competition.

Design firms like Schuemann's typically enter their work in international design industry competitions where it competes with all manner of consumer packaged goods for recognition; wineries enter their labels in competitions that are devoted solely to wine packaging.

"Competition is stiffer in the design world," Schuemann said, "and our winery clients do look at the design and packaging annuals published by global competitions like Graphis and the Dieline Packaging Awards, among others."

Schuemann said he sees awards from industry-specific packaging competitions being used by the trade to communicate a brand's ability to sell through based in part on its superior packaging and to reposition products after a brand has been refreshed. He cited one impressive case study of a brand that jumped from annual sales of 15,000 to 100,000 cases in a matter of months after it had been successfully rebranded.

"Wine is the single most competitive area of consumer packag-

ing and even sophisticated wine buyers are influenced by (a label)," said Ken Horiszny, principal of HKA Design in San Francisco. For his clients, consistency and conveying a certain level of credibility are always priorities. "Most people are still not confident about making wine choices," Horiszny said. "Wine packaging holds a unique place in consumers' minds."

#### WHAT CONSTITUTES A WINNER?

With a fistful of gold medals in categories like "Innovative Design," "Art/Illustration" and "Non Conformist" from the Wine Packaging and Design Awards of the Los Angeles International Wine & Spirits Competition, Bernie Hadley-Beauregard, principal of Brandever, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, creates designs that per-

form without pandering to specific demographics.

"When (marketing) people look at our work, they think they've done a good job targeting Millennials but, in reality, the designs are based on storytelling and the client base for the brands is quite broad," he said. Hadley-Beauregard emphasizes psychographics over demographics when developing brands: "We're working to create a vantage point that consumers haven't really seen before, as well as giving our clients ideas that are marketable and can generate sales."

While CF Napa does target Millennials for certain clients, Schuemann has seen more success with brands that capture a moment where lifestyle and a wine opportunity overlap, rather than focusing solely on demographics. "With the Clif Family Winery brand, we decided to go after all consumers that are outdoorsy and active rath-

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er than just focusing solely on Clif Bar's demographic, which is much younger. The result is a longer-lived brand that's not going to exclude anyone."

The agency's No. 1 request for wine label design falls into the category of "Contemporary Classic," which Schuemann describes as labels with classic design architecture and a modern twist.

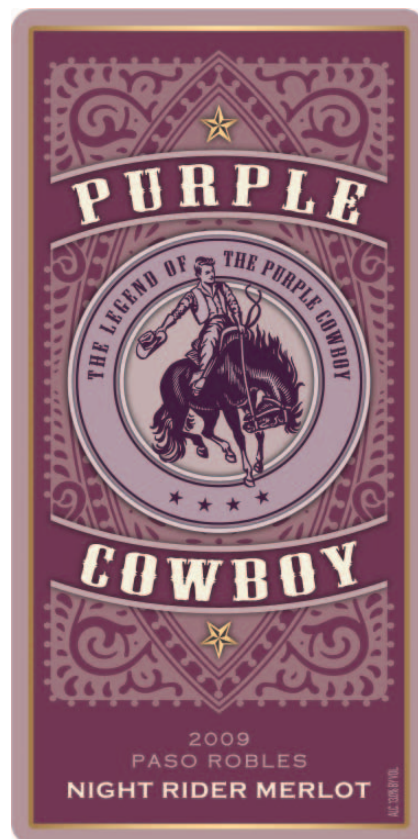
"When you market to a specific demographic, you put all of your eggs in one basket," confirmed Susan Lombardi, a web designer and social media consultant for Canopy Brands, who judges the Los Angeles International Wine & Spirits Competition Wine Packaging and Design Awards. "If you do choose a demographic, shoot for an emotional connection with the brand that elicits a sensory response – almost as if you can smell the wine. Wine has a way of touching consumers emotion-

ally, and that needs to extend to the packaging."

**TEXTURAL TRENDS**

One of the often-stated goals of packaging design is to enhance the consumer's experience and, in the case of wine packaging, designers are adding texture to labels and bottles using techniques such as deep embossing, high-build varnishes and silk screening with special inks. "Creating a tactile quality has been a huge success factor for many labels," Schuemann said. "It's a design approach that is unique to wine; we typically don't see it in general categories."

With the addition of texture, wine labels become more interesting the closer you get to them. HK's award-winning Purple Cowboy labels for Canopy Management (gold in the "Market Segment" category in Los Angeles) are a case in



Deep embossing and silk-screening techniques give the Purple Cowboy label the textured look of hand-tooled leather.

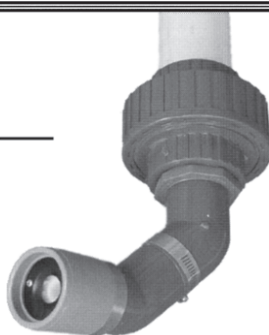
point. Working with Cameo Crafts in Sonoma, Calif., HK's label of a classic cowboy illustration and Old Western typeface uses deep embossing and silk-screening to emulate hand-tooled leather, resulting in an iconic label that conveys wine quality.

When branding professionals Katie Jain and Joel Templin, the duo behind Hatch Design in San Francisco, developed their own virtual brand – JAQK Cellars – they pulled out all of the stops. The brand theme for JAQK, an acronym for jack, ace, queen and king, plays on a gambling theme and the portfolio includes eight unique label designs.

Using a combination of techniques that include precision silk screening, sculpted embossing, double-sided printing and proprietary bottle shapes, Hatch developed a brand presence for JAQK that has won awards from the

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design industry's top international competitions, including the Dieline Packaging Awards, HOW Magazine International Design Awards and Pentawards: Worldwide Packaging Design Awards Competition, among many others.

"When we were developing the branding for JAQK, we discovered production processes that actually helped us evolve the label designs," Jain said.



**Hatch Design used a variety of processes to create JAQK's award-winning label series.**

For printing paper labels, Hatch worked with Collotype Labels in Napa to create double-sided, pressure-sensitive labels for Pearl Handle Chardonnay, with aces printed on the reverse side that can be seen through the clear bottle. Jain and Templin also used sculpted embossing to create the uneven texture on the Soldiers of Fortune Shiraz label that make it appear aged and worn.

Screen printing was done by Bergin Glass Impressions in Napa, which introduced Hatch to new screen-printing inks that create the effect of etched glass in Black Clover Merlot's intricate pattern of clubs. Charmed Sauvignon Blanc and Her Majesty Chardonnay both employ a 360-degree label that uses high-build varnish to create texture.

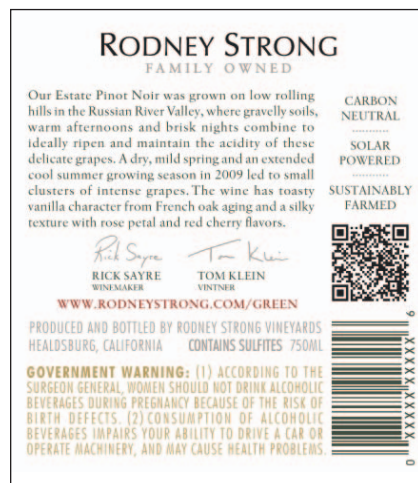
"It's interesting to watch how designers are innovating using existing technology," said David Busé of Collotype. "They are using

techniques like high-build varnishes to create texture and integrating it into all aspects of their packaging designs. The beauty of this approach is that you don't lose anything on the bottling line."

### QR CODE CONNECTIONS

Universal product codes (UPC or bar codes) aren't the only graphics you'll find on the backs of wine labels these days. Anne Gallagher, creative director at Big Fun! Inc. and a judge for the Los Angeles wine package design competition, points to the use of quick response (QR) codes on labels as a way for consumers to receive on-the-spot reviews, tasting notes, food-pairing ideas and recipes, simply by scanning a bottle's code with their smart phone.

"The use of smart phones and mobile technology is booming," she said, "and QR codes are a way of instantly connecting consumers with information about a brand that can influence and drive purchase decisions."



**Quick response codes, like the one shown above the standard bar code on this back label for Rodney Strong, can deliver instant reviews and information to consumers' smart phones.**

"QR codes are a great tool," confirmed Brandever's Hadley-Beaugard, who won double gold at the San Francisco International Wine Competition's 2010 Label

Design Awards for Backyard Vineyards' 2008 Gewurztraminer, and three gold medals in a variety of categories in the Los Angeles competition.

New York-based graphic designer Ana-Lucia Rosales, whose label design for the Tunisian brand Le Poisson Gris took the Overall Award and gold for "Successful Innovation" at the International Wine Label Design Competition in Napa, is also incorporating QR codes into her back labels. For the Le Poisson Gris brand, Rosales created a feeling of movement by placing design elements on the back label, which is typically devoted to text and technical information. Her goal was to create a functional, recognizable label, and she worked within a limited budget using above-average-quality paper, multiple colors for the series, and foil highlights on the front and back labels to create what judges described as a "beautiful aesthetic" from all angles.

Though designers including Rosales agree that visually arresting designs have what is known as "shelf impact," it takes more than bizarre graphics to resonate with consumers. In the case of Purple Cowboy, it's branding that comes right to the point with packaging that appeals to the "Marlborough Man" or woman of wine. For Le Poisson Gris, that connection is based on the fish being a pervasive symbol of good luck and good fortune in Tunisia. In both cases, these award-winning labels are successful because they strike a fine balance between being visually arresting and commercially viable. ■

*Deborah Parker Wong is the Northern California editor for The Tasting Panel magazine. She earned her WSET Diploma in 2009.*

*Comments? Please e-mail us at feedback@vwm-online.com.*