

Judging a wine by its label

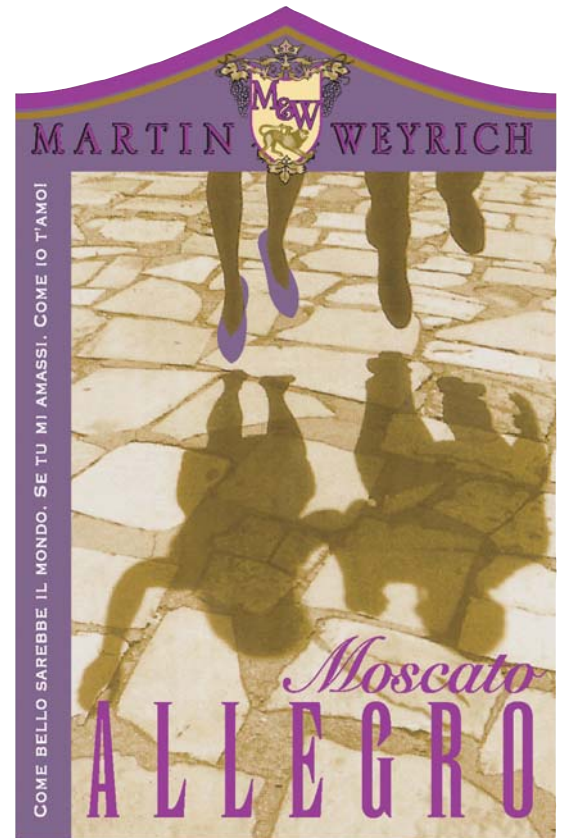
Story and Photos by Katy Budge

Let's face it – we've all done it: gone into a store and bought a bottle of wine without knowing anything about it ... simply because we liked the label. When that happens, then the label has done its job. It has made you buy the wine, and that's no easy task.

A wine label is essentially a logo, a symbol of the winery. But unlike a typical corporate brand, a wine label has to be many things to many people. As Jennifer Glossner of Upstairs Marketing Group explained, "If Robert Parker gives it a 93 or more, (the label) isn't important in the short-run. If it's an Aligoté – nobody but a wine geek is going to consider it anyway. If it's a grocery store wine, it's important. One has 1/5 second to catch a consumer's eye amongst the hundreds of wines on the grocery store shelf."

In its purest sense, "a good wine label is like a great work of art," said Samson Pinto, creative director/principal of Spin Creative Designs. "The designer has to visualize the design as a total package. The right type of mold, choice of paper, ink applications and -- last but not least -- the right capsule design, all create a finished look which speaks for what's in the bottle. A well-designed wine label can be a powerful element in conveying the message of passion, elegance and sophistication of the winery and its wine."

As Pinto noted, there are an infinite number of options to consider when approaching a wine label. Decisions have to be made about shape, where the label will be positioned on the bottle, colors, paper, type design, size of type, whether to add a foil, whether to emboss the label, and whether to coat it with a protective varnish. To add to the



puzzle, any design decisions have to be feasible when it comes to the printing process, otherwise even the best idea will never become reality.

"Our challenges are usually related to technical issues due to complex design. Wine labels as a category require the highest quality print surfaces, inks, and other value-added components," said Joe Guy, General Manager of WS Packaging Group, Inc. in San Luis Obispo, which prints upwards of 14 million labels a year for the wine industry. "Every product is engineered to order, they're all unique, and everyone wants the perfect label. Our mission every day is to provide the perfect label."

Of course, a wine label is made to be put on a wine bottle, so the designer also has to factor in the application process. It used to be that all labels were "sheet-fed," meaning that they were printed in large sheets, then cut to their individual size. Today, many bottling lines use "pressure-sensitive" labels, meaning that the labels are essentially individual stickers that come off of a large roll in the bottling process.

"It's a customer choice," said Guy. "There's still a large percentage of sheet-fed customers, but we've seen a significant migration to pressure sensitive. From an aesthetic sense, it's hard to distinguish from the two; it depends what the bottling lines can handle."

Regardless of whether a label is sheet-fed or pressure-sensitive, quality control is an important step in the printing process. WS Packaging uses high-tech vision systems and strobe technology to check for quality in the pressure-sensitive labels, but there's still a pair of human eyes that we rely on to ensure the perfect print. As for the sheet-fed labels, "every single one is hand-inspected," said Guy.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 ➤

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

Examples of "Good Labels"

Jennifer Glossner, Upstairs Marketing Group

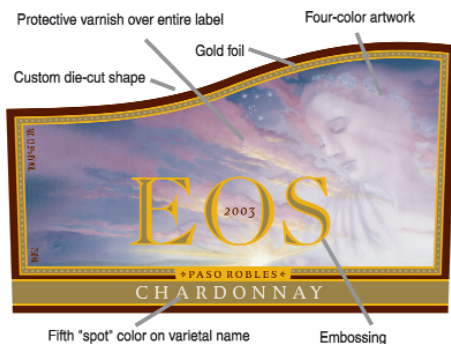
"Wine is a sensual product -- sensual beyond taste and smell; it involves all the senses, including touch. A wine label with an emboss, or a textured label cries out to be held. This may aid in a purchasing decision, and certainly gives the perception of quality.

"Halter Ranch is a good example of this. The label design is relatively simple, and if the label were flat, the effect would be as well. It's printed on a beautifully textured paper with thoughtful embossing that makes one want to pick up the bottle and feel it. The overall package is very effective.

"Another example is Martin & Weyrich's Moscato Allegro. It's a low alcohol, slightly effervescent, off-dry wine, perfect for, and primarily enjoyed by, women. It's got a feminine label and is bottled in dramatic glass that people save, mostly women, and therefore are reminded of whenever they see it on their shelf. Very smart marketing."

Samson Pinto, creative director/principal of Spin Creative Designs

"The Linne Calodo labels. I had total creative freedom to experiment with new design



ideas and printing techniques. The labels use a minimalist approach combined with complex patterns and varnish effects, all of which work together to convey the winemaker's thoughts when making the perfect blends."

About the EOS label

This EOS Chardonnay label demonstrates the technical challenges involved in printing a wine label. Because the label has: 1) four-color artwork, 2) a fifth "spot color", 3) gold foil, 4) embossing, 5) varnish, and 6) a custom shape that must be die-cut, the label has to make six passes through the printing equipment, then each individual label is hand-inspected for quality control.

WS Packaging Group, Inc. and Cal Poly

General Manager Joe Guy noted that "we have a lot of interns from Cal Poly's graphic communication department, and we definitely foster that relationship. The diversity in the students -- we have someone here now from Russia and someone born and raised here in San Luis -- makes for a really great blend in our work force. It's also a highly respected school, and the graduates have earned a reputation for intelligence and hands-on experience."



Individual wine labels are hand inspected to ensure quality control.



The Linne Calodo labels are a good example of creative design ideas and sophisticated printing techniques.