Urban Vines: The Art of the Wine Label
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Design can be found anywhere, from the shoes on your feet to the bottle in your hand. In the past few years I have developed a growing interest in the wine industry. From the moment you decide to purchase a bottle of wine you are embarking on a journey. Selecting a bottle of wine is truly a unique experience. In most cases, the task is much more enjoyable now than it was in previous decades. The design of every bottle, cork, label, and package is truly a piece of art, which can make your experience one to remember.

I have always had an interest in small wineries. Just like any small business, they are built with love. My initial intention was to find a solution for getting a small winery’s brand coast to coast. I created five wine bottle labels geared toward landmark settings in the United States, and individual poster designs for each bottle of wine, as well as a classy and youthful company logo Urban Vines.

The labels were designed to appeal to a new, younger generation of wine consumers, based primarily on an original concept for the label design and further supported in the research. Research has shown that wine producers are marketing to younger consumers (under age 30) and wine labels, as a result, are being transformed. Wine labels are becoming visually more appealing than in previous years. An article in the Journal of Wine Research (2007) states, “Wine consumption has increased in the 30-49 year old age group and the 50 and over age group, while consumption by the under 30 age group has remained flat, primarily due to increased marketing efforts of spirits manufacturers” (Barber, Ismail, & Taylor, p.76). As a result, in designing the wine labels and posters, creating something to attract younger consumers was of high importance. (Barber, Ismail, & Taylor, 2007; Ivinski, 2000; Thomas & Pickering, 2003; Weingarten & Adler, 2005).

Once the topic was established, a number of formal concerns needed to be addressed.
Some seemed fairly easy to figure out, while others posed more of a challenge. Most centered around the actual task of creating the labels, the availability of scholarly research, and the importance of understanding the laws and regulations regarding wine labels. I began by researching the history, the laws, and visual attributes, and decided to create the posters as advertisements to help support the brand.

While designing the labels I began with sizing and attaching the labels, as well as making a visually stimulating label, a brand name that was noteworthy, and a concept that was fresh and new. I wanted the labels to be professional looking and something I would buy if I saw the wine bottle on the shelf, with a simple yet clean and easy to read design.

It was important that the company name and logo that accurately reflected the design concept. I decided on Urban Vines as a name that was easy to remember, and modern enough to attract the target consumers. I included the silhouette of a bird behind the company name. This design decision was intended to emphasize the idea of migrating from each location included on the series of labels. The bird was an earth blue tone with small green polka dots, with a white texture layered over top of it to give it a worn, vintage look. I selected a font that was easy to read, but visually still had the vintage feeling I wanted to accomplish.

Five cities across the United States were part of my label designs: Seattle, Las Vegas, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York City because they all are top travel destinations within
the United States. Each wine label includes a recognizable image of a landmark from its city. I used black and white images because visually black and white made a greater impact on the viewer and with background colors being used, colored images did not read as clearly as a black and white image. I tinted each image with the background color of that label. For example, the New York City background is blue and the opacity over the image is 15%. Barber, Ismail, & Taylor (2007) stated that,

Front labels are the first line of communication to attract the consumer; therefore it is extremely important that characteristics appearing on the label are visually attractive and easy to read in order to stand out from the large number of competing bottles available on the retail shelf. Front labels can provide key recognition factors through their shape, color and position as well as the information offered (p. 76).

I also put the place of origin on the front label since research regarding consumer preference often found this to be viewed as the most important influencing factor identified by consumers, “Respondents ranked the front label cue—country of origin—as the most important attribute when purchasing wine…” (Barber, Ismail, & Taylor, 2007, p. 81).

It was important to make the front label structurally easy to read and clear to the consumer. It was also just as important to make a modern, fun, and inviting front label. Historically, wine labels were very plain. Now some people buy the bottle solely for the look. Barber, Ismail, & Taylor say, “Compared to labels presently on the market, front wine labels were historically highly standardized, uninteresting, and unimaginative. Old World wines traditionally restricted their front label design changes, keeping the classic wine label structure to sustain the image of quality through tradition and history” (Barber, Ismail & Taylor 2007, p. 76).
A social concern considered when designing the labels was making sure the images were "socially recognizable". I used landmarks across the United States, and I hoped that would be a trigger for happy emotions for a large number of consumers. For example, one would see the image of the Seattle Space Needle and remember a happy feeling associated with that location and in retrospect have that feeling while enjoying a glass of Urban Vines wine. I also planned that the labels would be good conversation starters for certain consumers. As Barber, Ismail, and Taylor (2007) said,

"Both Chaney (2000) and Thomas (2000) have suggested the front label and the wine
bottles’ overall packaging make a statement about the individual consumer and their ability to select good wine well beyond the point of purchase. This can place added social importance on the front label; whereby, depending on the situation for which a wine is purchased, it may have an impact on the consumer’s reputation with their peers. An ‘Oh this looks good’ comment at a dinner party can be a tremendous confidence booster and enhance the stature of the host in the eyes of their guests” (p. 77).

The back labels were designed to visually mimic the front label, by incorporating the bird from the company logo. This was solely a visual design decision. There are specific regulations imposed by the government regarding what the label should say, but how to include this wording is largely left to the designer. The back labels include the warning label required by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB). Interestingly, the requirement to include a health warning statement on back labels was only implemented in the late 20th century. Reynolds (2011) wrote,

Recent historical changes in the requirements regarding a health warning statement on wine labels... “Things used to be a lot simpler” ... 1989 Senator Thurmond/congress began to require a specific health warning on the label if alcoholic content exceeded 4.0%... It is incredibly specific and is often what gets a new label rejected by the TTB... (pp. 18-19).

The required warning label is as follows, “(1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IMPAIRS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY, AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS”. (Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau [TTB], 2008).

The TTB further requires this government warning be printed on a contrasting background. If the health warning statement does not appear on a contrasting background, if one word is misplaced or misspelled, or one comma added or omitted, it may cause a new wine label to be rejected by the TTB. Thus, in designing the labels, this is one area where graphic design
skills are extremely limited. The only thing left to the discretion of the designer is which contrasting colors (background color and font color) to use. (Reynolds, A., 2011 p. 20)

Wine label backs almost always include a description of the wine, though this is not mandated by the TTB. Research on this topic overwhelmingly reported that the types of information consumers find most useful in helping them come to a purchase decision are simple descriptions of the tastes and smells of the wine. For example, Charters, Lockshin, and Unwin (1999) found,

In terms of the actual words that are seen as being overwhelmingly positive or negative… words describing aromas and tastes are generally viewed as helpful, whereas those describing processes of wine production or maturation are viewed as being unhelpful. Thus words such as ‘acidity’, ‘blackberry’, ‘butterscotch’, ‘cherry’, … were all seen as being helpful, whereas words such as ‘balance’, ‘basket’, ‘fermentation’, … were considered to be unhelpful (p. 97).

The wine descriptions for the back labels use words that easily connect to the consumer’s sense of taste and smell. Walker (2009) also adds,

“Philips says that everyone should recognize the power of packaging. ‘Everyone who buys wines is a label buyer,’ he says. ‘It's the label that tells the story through name, typeface, and design. It's [even] more influential than we think,’ he continues, citing studies that show how merely suggesting the way things smell and taste is dramatically more influential than how things actually smell and taste” (pp. 52-53).

It seemed fun and useful to include food pairings on each bottle for the amateur consumer. Being a wine consumer myself, I have discussed with many other local consumers how we feel it would be helpful for more producers to include this information. Below is one example of a back label I designed. (Barber, Ismail, & Taylor, 2007; Charters, Lockshin, & Unwin, 1999; Walker, 2009).
In an effort to increase advertisement for the wine industry, I designed wine posters for each type of wine. As stated earlier, consumption for the younger generation in the wine industry is staying flat. Advertisements are everywhere for other alcoholic beverages, but are nearly impossible to find for wine. Even the most well-known brands of wine lack advertisements, so I designed simple and easy to read posters for advertisement purposes, emphasizing location and connecting that with the type of wine by enlarging the city name to make a clear connection with the image, and flattening the label over the bottle illustration so the image and type of wine could be clearly read. I wanted the viewer to make the connection that an amateur wine consumer might make, in hopes that the less knowledgeable consumer might walk down the wine aisle and even if he/she doesn’t remember the type of wine previously enjoyed, might remember the wine with the Seattle Space Needle on the front. (Barber, Ismail, & Taylor, 2007, p.76)
In conclusion, I have accomplished the ability to take a concept and all its concerns, and mold it into a visual solution. I had an idea to help small wineries overcome a large task, help the wine industry focus more on advertising, and help the amateur consumer become more aware. Historically, wine labels have been dull. This generation has taken a new approach to creating an artistic and attractive wine label. It is true that design can be found anywhere, but the journey of finding the perfect bottle of wine lies deeper than what is inside the bottle.
We have searched the United States to create a collection of authentic, great tasting wines, with layers of flavor.

Fresh flavors of plums and cherries. Enjoy Urban Vines Merlot alone or paired with poultry, red meat, pork, or your favorite pasta.

Bottled and Produced by Urban Vines Winery
Sonoma, CA

750mL
CONTAINS SULFITES

GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) ACCORDING TO THE SURGEON GENERAL, WOMEN SHOULD NOT DRINK ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES DURING PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE RISKS TO BIRTH DEFECTS. (2) CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES PROMPTS YOUR ABILITY TO DRIVE A CAR OR OPERATE MACHINERY AND MAY CAUSE HEALTH PROBLEMS.
References

Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. (April, 2008). What you should know about grape wine labels. Pamphlet.


