

Label designer pushes the boundaries

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Special to the Edmonton Journal
VANCOUVER

I remember vividly the first time I saw one of Bernie Hadley-Beaugard's wine labels: it was a cartoon. First I thought it was kind of cute, then I figured it was mildly blasphemous, but definitely quirky and infinitely memorable.

Then the wines began to sell like proverbial hotcakes.

Hadley-Beaugard's Brandever Strategies studio has become something of a legend in the world of B.C. wine, which can be just about as entertaining and notorious as B.C. politics: not short on character and often good for a laugh.

His first foray into wine was to rebrand the linguistically challenging Prpich Hills, at the behest of its new owners. The solution? Glorify local folklore about a church that had been moved down the valley with the help of a few sticks of dynamite. The new name? Blasted Church, a handle nobody has forgotten, especially with designs by talented artist Monika Melnychuk.



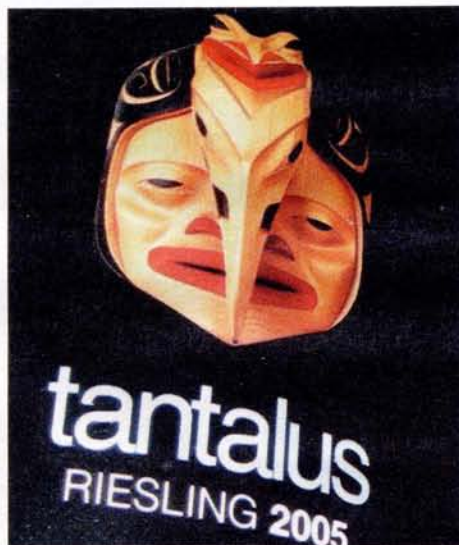
But Hadley-Beaugard was far from finished with the Prpich project. His next stroke of genius was to create caricatures of wine writers, enshrining their likenesses on the Blasted Church Pinot Gris label, suitably cassocked and singing as the church choir.

Wine writers have egos not far removed from those of some winery owners, so coverage was guaranteed. Blasted Church's first release of Pinot Gris sold out. My wife even bought the T-shirt. Not one, but three. And the brand just keeps on gaining converts. Its Chardonnay has been picked as one of 25 finalists in Europe's Best Wine Label 2007 Competition from more than 4,260 entries.

After Blasted Church came a string of ever more edgy offerings, from Dirty Laundry to Lotus Land, Stone's Throw and the stylish Tantalus, a striking First Nations mask.

All have won their share of accolades in an increasingly design-conscious wine world.

Like it or not, regardless of what's in the bottle, most of us shop by the label. Con-



fronted with hundreds of bottles in a wine shop, we buy what we remember. We tend to know whether we want red or white, and often, in this new world of wine, we remember the varietal. But unless the name and image are etched into our consciousness — as with icons such as Mateus, Black Tower, Yellow Tail or Screaming Eagle — we take our clues from the label.

Hadley-Beaugard is at the forefront of a new generation of marketers who come to the wine industry unencumbered by tradition or by the kind of suffocating laws long endured in Old World appellation.

His infectious, cheeky style has pushed B.C. forward with a refreshing irreverence that just seems to match the province's character.

What's the trick?

"There's a lot of Pablum labels out there: the proliferation of large companies is producing safe brands. I'm more of a risk taker," says Hadley-Beaugard.

"Look at all the reality TV shows



that are quite raunchy. Everything is much more in your face. Consumers can take it, but many wineries are still stuck in yesterday, still trying to emulate brands planted many decades ago."

Consumers gravitate to "awful names" like Dirty Laundry "because they enjoy the humour and storytelling," he says.

"We push the boundaries. And I don't believe in research."

The golden rule? Take the risk. "If we're test marketing and people say, 'I like it,' we've got a problem."

Other brands that have benefited from the ace marketer's live-dangerously strategy range from Therapy Vineyards

(where he and the owners sifted through 600 names) to the

Naramata Bench Wineries Association — barely a blip on the map before Hadley-Beaugard arrived on the scene. Now it's better known for wine than nearby and larger Penticton or Oliver.

Next up for

him is Monster Vineyards (a value spinoff of Poplar Grove that plays on the "hoax" of Oogopogo, the monster that supposedly inhabits Lake Okanagan) and another label for Dirty Laundry.

Laughing Stock has them breaking down the doors to reserve bottles of the next Portfolio, the winery's well-crafted Bordeaux blend.

Much of the wine world is falling over themselves to come up with the next Yellow Tail, spawning a slew of what the industry calls "critter labels."

And being a frontier kind of place, it's no surprise that B.C. has more than its share of critter labels.

Its viticultural menagerie ranges from the turtle (Nk'Mip), Antelope (Ridge) and Stag's Hollow to a Dark Horse (Inniskillin Okanagan) and even angelic dogs (See Ya Later Ranch).

But birds capture most of the critter ink — a curious thing when you consider most grape growers try to outsmart everything avian that could descend on the vineyard to strip it bare in a matter of hours.

Blue Grouse Vineyards in Duncan salutes the shy ground dweller, while in Oliver, Jim Wyse and family have helped the Burrowing Owl make a comeback.

You'll find no shortage of cutely crested quail at Quails' Gate Estate in Kelowna, while Red Rooster in Penticton raised chickens before grapes.

And bird lovers flocking to Westham Island Estate Winery, just south of Vancouver, can sip on SnoGoos gooseberry wine while watching the annual migration.

You can also taste Just Ducky rosé — the winemaker's salute to the most famous (infamous?) bird label ever: Baby Duck.

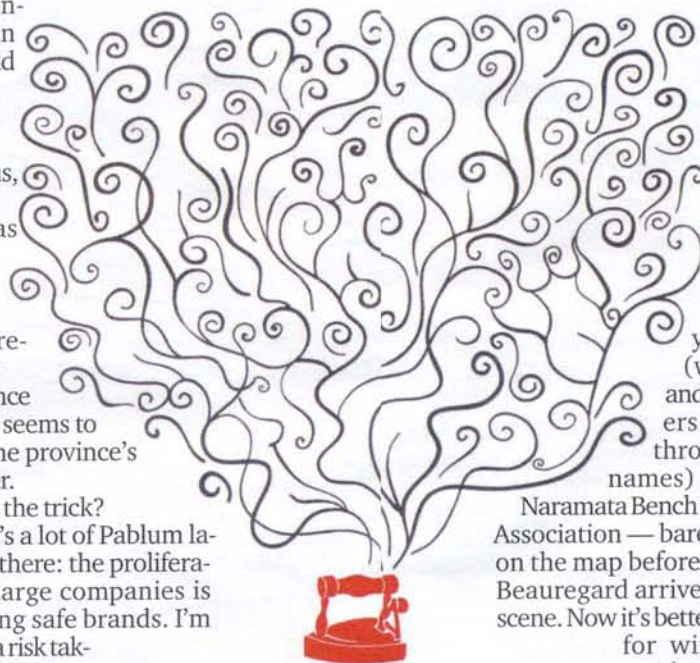
Critters are fine, says the labelmeister, if for no other reason than that people can easily remember the wine they had on Saturday night.

If you've had a chuckle from a fun or quirky B.C. wine label recently, chances are Hadley-Beaugard helped dream it up. Plus, you'll remember it, and recall is everything.

"All I can do is get the first date with the consumer," he says.

The second date? That depends very much on how good the wine is.

Vancouver-based Tim Pawsey writes about food and wine



Dirty Laundry™

