



The Blasted Church, shown in about 1900 at its original location at Fairview town site gold mine, was blown up and reconstructed at Okanagan Falls and is now featured by a local winery. Story, C3.

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Wacky label an unforgettable hook



INNOVATION | Marketeer taps Blasted Church to launch a new vintage, the Sun's **Maurice Bridge** finds

Try to ignore this: Blasted Church. Can't do it. What church? Why blasted? Blasted how? A wine? You're kidding. Nope. It's a wine all right, six different ones, actually, and a very clever marketing campaign. It aims to build a reputation for a small, little-known Okanagan winery, and so far, it's right on target.

Branding is tricky, particularly for small businesses in a crowded field, because something as seemingly simple as a name can make all the difference between success and a lifetime at the back of the pack. This is hardly a new concept, but like playing the blues or driving a golf ball, getting it right is elusive.

Bernie Hadley-Beaugard has been running his own one-man marketing firm in Dunbar for about 18 months. I've known him a few years, and even when the local high-tech he was marketing for slammed on the brakes and shed most of its staff, he had the marketing smarts and humour to send out an e-mail announcing that he "had been voted off the island."

So we figured that one way or another, Bernie would be okay.

He has a background in consumer packaged goods which includes Purdy's Chocolates, Granville Island Brewing and Calona Wines, as well as operations and marketing experience with Starbucks. Working as a "virtual corporation" — hiring the pros he needs for the contracts he gets — he has built up a clientele for his company, Brandever Strategy Inc., using the catchline "Everything matters."

"The philosophy of everything matters is that it's much beyond just having a very elegant package or a catchy name," he explains. "It's that when you build a brand, you want to ensure that all of the touch points with consumers are considered."

So when he met Chris and Evelyn Campbell, he had to examine those touch points from the ground up. The Campbells, a pair of accountants from West Van who didn't want to be accountants any more, had just bought a winery outside Okanagan Falls with the vowel-challenged name



Cindy Sheldon and Bernie Hadley-Beaugard celebrate their release of the new campaign for 'Blasted Church' wine selling at selected stores.

MARK VAN MANEN/VANCOUVER SUN

of Prpich Hills.

Dan Prpich had owned it for 30 years, running it first as a soft-fruit orchard, then switching to growing grapes for wineries about 10 years ago. Starting in 1998, he added a full winery facility, good for about 10,000 cases a year, but after his wife passed on, he decided to pack it in and sell.

The Campbells had been looking for a complete change for several years, and their accounting experience told them this was it. It also told them they would need help.

"I'm an accountant, what do I know about marketing?" asks Evelyn, on the phone from the winery store, looking out at the merlot vines running down to the lake. She knew enough to want to be different, but that was about it as far as branding went.

"It had to be something really funky or wild, something that we could see, maybe, down in California or Australia, something that the Okanagan and Canada hadn't seen yet," she says.

"It was easy to say that, but it's hard to actually end up adapting that and saying this is what we're going to be from now on for ever and ever."

Bernie went up there this summer to get a feel for the place and do some research. They quickly ruled out anything geographical — no hills, leaps, crags or lakes. Likewise no animals.

"A lot of people would think that if you were to launch a wine product, it

calls for elegance of the package, it calls for conservatism and looking like a family," says Bernie. "There's a trend right now toward minimalism where most of the labels are shrinking down and becoming postage stamps, so I said, if everyone's wearing a bikini, I'm going to wear the full bodysuit."

He found his bodysuit in a tiny local museum and the story of an old wooden church in a deserted mining camp 16 miles outside Okanagan Falls.

In 1929, the town decided it needed the church, and sent a crew to get it. But building methods and materials being what they were in those days, 30 years of weathering made the building all but impossible to dismantle without wrecking it.

That is, until they hit on the idea of removing the stained glass, covering the window frames, tossing in four sticks of dynamite and running like hell. The explosion loosened the nails nicely, the church was dismantled, hauled by truck and reassembled in Okanagan Falls, where it still stands.

"You know when somebody goes into a wine store and says, I had a wine a year ago that was good, but I can't remember its name?" Bernie asks.

"A conservative label with an elegant name would die on the shelf; it would just make you a me-too proposition, and would have required a great deal of time and capital to get

into the desired restaurants."

Restaurants were the next step. With thousands of wines reviewed in the wine publications each month, he had to bring Blasted Church to influential locations.

"What you want to do is generate critical momentum from the get-go, and I think that control of the experience is what will enable a brand to be successful as much as it can.

"In the earlier stages, if you can team with very specialized retailers and highly select restaurants who value the customer relationship and are willing to invest the time and energy in learning your story and then bring it on to their clientele, that's a win-win scenario."

Among the dozen-plus upper-end restaurants he persuaded to carry Blasted Church are internationally known Sooke Harbour House on Vancouver Island, and Coco Pazzo, the latest west-side outing for Vancouver chef Ken Bogas.

Sooke Harbour House proprietor Sinclair Philip liked the wine enough to recommend it for a dinner for Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson in Vancouver this summer, while Coco Pazzo's menu describes the label "the most unique" in the province, and urges diners to ask their waiter for the story.

On the retail side, since provincial liquor distribution stores take the

biggest bite out of B.C. wine sales, Blasted Church restricts its sales to its winery store and private wine shops around the Lower Mainland and Victoria.

Wine-tastings are standard events for many of these outlets, but when Blasted Church scheduled three tastings in the Vancouver area this past Saturday, Bernie ramped-up the promotion, adding 300 e-mails to the 50 postcards sent by Evelyn, and generated extra walk-in traffic.

The result was one of the most successful tastings Village VQA Wines on West 41st has ever had, says manager Cindy Sheldon. Evelyn poured and chatted and sold 62 bottles there, for a total of 20 cases (12 bottles each) in all sold at the three outlets.

"It really has been different from any other product that has been done in B.C.," says Cindy. "It's the first to say, let's do something different, we're not afraid."

Not afraid of anything, apparently: Bernie has ambitions to take Blasted Church wines to Australia and the U.S., where the Canadian dollar will help the \$12-to-\$18 price tag, and right into the heart of the Napa Valley.

"I want to sell coals to Newcastle," he says with a grin, setting his sights on the most influential restaurant in California. "I want to sell it to the French Laundry."

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