

The Christening. Mission

A vintner's quest for the perfect name for a new wine

Joseph Gaston Pierre Bernard Hadley-Beauregard (and with a string of names like that, it's not surprising he asks everyone to call him Bernie) was sitting in the home office of his Vancouver marketing consultancy one March day in 2002 when an old pal at an advertising agency called to tantalize him about a new project that an executive at yet another agency had casually mentioned. It was one of those networking calls that get placed hundreds of times a day in any business community; the account was too small-potatoes for either ad agency but the friend thought Bernie might be intrigued. It was a wine project, and indeed he was intrigued.

by John T.D. Keyes • photography Candace Meyer



Bernie runs a one-man marketing and branding company called Brandever Strategies. At the time the friend called, he was focused on one of his clients, TrashBusters. Bernie was the guy who had proposed the company's unforgettable phone number GET 1-800 RID-OF-IT, currently emblazoned on the sides of all TrashBusters trucks, and he was now trying to come up with another brainwave that would cost next to nothing to implement.

Bernie's background is in consumer packaged goods, though, and when he got a whiff of a wine project his response was instantaneous: "I have to get this!" Now 42, he had started collecting wine about five years earlier and always coveted a winery as a client, ever since working as marketing manager for Granville Island Brewing and Calona Wines. He pestered his friend's friend with phone messages, but they never connected. Then, Evelyn Campbell called: "I don't know much about marketing consultants, except to know that I need one."

Evelyn Campbell, 45, and her husband Chris, 47, were about to uproot their comfortable West Vancouver lives for a chance to grasp the grape ring. She was a CGA with Vancouver software company Dataphile, he was an administrative executive at securities giant Raymond James, and they were planning to quit their jobs, cash it all in, sell their home and their boat, and buy a \$3-million winery in Okanagan Falls called Prpich Hills. Evelyn would deal with sales and marketing; Chris would manage the vineyard and winery. Evelyn was working her way through a short list of prospective consultants. Would Bernie like to be considered? He would.

They met for coffee at the White Spot on West Georgia

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near Stanley Park. Evelyn explained they had already hired a consultant to write a marketing plan and were simply looking for someone to help with a new name. Bernie tried to hide his consternation. "How can you write a marketing plan without a name?" he wondered to himself. But if naming the winery was the only job left open, so be it.

"It's taken me some time to realize this," Bernie told Evelyn, warming to the task, "but when it comes to naming wine, to be safe is dangerous. There are some successful boring labels, but they have huge marketing dollars behind them. And look at the availability. Everyone and his neighbor is producing wine. In the liquor store, everyone's approach is the same, trying to create elbow room on the shelf."

Evelyn unrolled a huge photo. At 70 acres, 41 under vine, this was no Green Acres vanity project for a couple of city slickers. Prpich Hills – whatever the named was changed to – could be the poster child for all the vineyards in the Okanagan. This is the real deal, thought Bernie, and he wanted the gig more than ever, especially when Evelyn said she is "a risky person. I need something that's out there and wild. I don't want to be just another wine."

He asked the Campbells to forestall their hiring decision

until they had a chance to meet a few days later at Marquis Wines, the specialty shop on Davie Street in Vancouver's West End. "I made arrangements with David Lancelot, one of the guys on the floor there, to give the Campbells a wine tour in terms of names and labels. Here are the dogs and the heroes."

During the two-hour tutorial that evening, Lancelot drew their attention to Frog's Leap, a Napa Valley winery whose froggy labels are eye-catching and full of cheeky, unexplained references, such as a string of tiny capital letters TFWYHF (Time Flies When You're Having Flies) in one corner. "Sommeliers like it, because it gives added value to the table experience," said Bernie that evening. "I like it because no one in B.C. has done anything like this, so it's an opportunity. As soon as you do it, you close the window for others. Even if someone imitates you, you'll always be the reference point."

Bernie had barely gotten home that night when the phone rang. It was Evelyn: "You've got the job."

The List

Before the blue-skying and brainstorming began, there were a few practical matters to be addressed.

Once the real estate deal closed, the Campbells would not only acquire the vineyard and winery, but also 15,000 litres of wine in vats and barrels to be bottled and sold. Wine industry protocol frowns on new owners putting their name on wine not made under their auspices, so the marketing plan called for not one new name but two – a temporary one for the existing wine,

and a permanent one for subsequent Campbell harvests.

There was also the matter of distribution. Dan Prpich had sold his wine only on-site and in a handful of specialty wine shops. The Campbells opted to follow his example, but expand the number of shops, eschewing the provincial liquor stores, which remitted the smallest profit margin. Bernie saw a side benefit. The specialty stores display inventory by winery, not by type of wine. If the product were intriguingly named and packaged, it would display better there than at liquor stores where the brand would be broken up into reds and whites and so on, spread throughout the store.

As for what not to name the winery, he need only walk into his neighborhood liquor store and scan the shelves awash in Creeks, Hills, Ridges, Estates. "It makes sense when you're standing in a vineyard looking up at a mountain to name the vineyard after the mountain, but when you walk into the retail store where all these geographical parcels are now side by side, one Creek next to another, Hill next to Hill next to Ridge, it's confusing." He also was determined to avoid names of animals, especially endangered ones (Burrowing Owl), and naming it after the Campbells themselves (the Mondavi or Jackson-

Triggs model) seemed downright boring.

Bernie fired off a couple of emails to Evelyn about the six basic naming criteria: uniqueness, credibility, reproducibility, legibility, durability, compatibility. The six boiled down to this: they needed a catchy name that someone could remember long enough to recognize once they're in the store.

He now began to think of names, adding them to a master list, often sitting up late at night when a flurry would hit him.

prohibition against animals and included Poorwill (a local bird) and Mountain Goat. And so it went.

By the time he met Evelyn for a daytime brainstorming session at her office, Bernie had 395 names on a spreadsheet... but nothing jumped off the page for either of them. "We need a name like Screaming Wives," said Evelyn, still determined to push the envelope.

"This is a dream client," thought Bernie. "Maybe it would

Day and night, Bernie added to the list: Bartered Accountants, Bean There, Counted That, Dew Diligence, Blithe Spirit, Bon Vivant, and Paramour; looking for that one 'brake-light' name

By day, he read books about the Okanagan region and surfed winery sites on the internet for inspiration. He drove up to Okanagan Falls to have a look-see, a trip that both educated him and gave him pause. Heading south from Penticton on Highway 97, he had to cut eastward to reach Prpich Hills on the far shore of Lake Skaha. Putsimply, the winery was way off the beaten track. Bernie drove back to Vancouver determined to come up with a "brake-light name" – something that would make tourists exclaim, "Stop the car!"

Day and night, he added to his list. There were riffs on the Campbells' financial backgrounds: Bartered Accountants and Bean There, Counted That and Dew Diligence. There were sheer whimsies: Blithe Spirit and Bon Vivant and Paramour. One day he got into a rut with the word hand: Hand-in-Hand, Hand-in-Time, Handmade, Hands & Heart, Hands & Time, Handshake, Handskill. The trip to Prpich Hills gave him Herringbone, after the woven pattern of the Prpich vineyards sloping down to Skaha Lake, and there were 18 iterations of the name Skaha itself, including Skaha Howl, Hurdle, Muse and Myth. A Parson's Road he had noticed on his drive led to Parson's Bench, Parson's Heaven... and Sky and Stash and View. Further historical reading produced Kickininee (an early version of Kokanee). Since he was simply brainstorming he broke his own



NAME THAT WINE:
Bernie Hadley-Beauregard sifted through hundreds of ideas

help to eliminate names,” he suggested. “If you and Chris start looking into the mirror before you go to bed at night and practise using them in a greeting. ‘Hi, I’m Evelyn. I’m with Ankle-deep Vineyards.’ ‘Hi, I’m Chris, with Stark-naked Vineyards.’ See if you can keep a straight face.”

By now, Bernie was beginning to think their answer lay in some forgotten corner of Okanagan history. “In my reading I’d come across some lovely folktales, and I was leaning toward a name that had an historical basis. I wanted something you might have read about if Okanagan Falls had had its own *People* magazine a hundred years ago.”

Turns out the town has its own tiny museum, which Bernie had missed on his first trip. On a late May weekend, when the Campbells were planning to be up in the Okanagan, he stopped by. He was chatting idly with the elderly custodian about local history. This and that and “Oh, there’s the dynamite church.” . . . Bernie’s ears went up.

By now, Bernie was beginning to think their answer lay in some forgotten corner of Okanagan history. “I wanted something you might have read about a hundred years ago”

Back in 1929 a work crew was dispatched to a deserted mining camp some 16 miles away to dismantle an old wooden church and bring it to Okanagan Falls. It was customary back then to loosen stubborn nails with a small, controlled explosion of dynamite inside the building. Alas, the foreman used a bit too much dynamite and blew the steeple off.

Sans steeple, the rest of the building was successfully dismantled, moved to Okanagan Falls and reconstructed with a new steeple. It’s still in use today as Okanagan Falls United Church.

Bernie’s heart was pounding. He tried to keep a straight face: “Do people call it the ‘blasted church?’” Oh no, said the custodian, the soul of solemnity. “I did that once, and there was quite a fuss, and I’ve never done it again.” The custodian’s past verbal slip had, to the somewhat conservative congregation, edged on sacrilegious, if not impertinent. Impertinent, virtually unknown . . . perfect.

Later that day, Bernie was to meet the Campbells at a Greek restaurant in Penticton. They were already there when Bernie came in, sat down, his hands shaking. “I have the name. Blasted Church.” A moment’s silence

and then Chris burst out laughing. They all started laughing. Then Evelyn said, “How soon can we do this?”

The Decision

There were now 27 names on the short list: Blasted Church and CandleWick led the pack. The initial thinking was that Blasted Church might be the intermediary name and CandleWick the long-term one. CandleWick had a rustic connotation the Campbells felt was compatible with the winery’s main log building. The 25 backups had survived the late-night mirror test: Blithe, Borealis, BrixHaven (brix is the sugar count in the grapes at harvest), BrookHaven, Chrysalis, Cloud 9, Coulera, Equity, Euphoria, Folktale, Houndstooth, Incorrigible, Kickininee, Leap-of-Faith, NightHawk, Paradox, ParAmour, Parson’s Bench, Rapscaillon, Rapture, Renard, Rustica, Skaha’s Tale, Starknaked and Swirl.

The list was sent to Vancouver lawyer

Bennett Lee, who specializes in wine trademarks, to verify whether CandleWick and Blasted Church were in any way encumbered. At a subsequent meeting, Evelyn and Bernie learned that Vincor, the huge Canadian wine conglomerate, owned the name Candlelit, which might cause problems down the road. But that wasn’t CandleWick’s sole drawback. “It’s an Ovaltine name,” said Lee, bluntly. So much for the determination to be audacious.

At that moment, Evelyn made the leap of faith. Excited, scared yet strangely confident at the same time: “Let’s just go with Blasted Church.”

Bernie’s prime job was done, but he couldn’t let go. The Campbells knew he had ideas for the labels, because he was often emailing mockups done on his laptop. He now flat-out asked to see the project through. They agreed.

It was now early June, and with an August launch date, Bernie had very little time to put their money where his mouth was.

His dream artist was Ralph Steadman, best known for illustrating the gonzo journalism of Hunter S. Thompson. Steadman is also a serious oenophile, author of the

lavish coffee table book *The Grapes of Ralph* and has done labels for wineries in California and Chile. Bernie’s thinking: “Blasted Church is edgy, Ralph is edgy, and he knows a lot about wine.” He contacted Steadman’s agent, but the more they talked, the more reservations Bernie began to have. “Every step was getting more complicated. There were cases of wine going here and there – reasonable requests, but my tummy was telling me this was going to be a very expensive initiative. We were very small.” (The Campbells’ entire marketing budget was a miniscule \$30,000.)

As Bernie agonized about what to do, he was flipping through a weekend edition of *The Globe and Mail*. He stopped at an illustration accompanying an article about office perks. (With a home office, Bernie’s perk is being able to work in his bathrobe. His goal is someday to move to new, expanded quarters in the garage.) The illustration’s quirky style was exactly what he wanted. To get a better sense, he snipped it out and wrapped it around a wine bottle. Yes.

Via the internet, Bernie Googled the illustrator’s name – Monika Melnychuk – negotiated a fee with her agent and by mid-June was drafting a creative briefing for the Toronto-based artist. She had two weeks to complete the assignment.

Blasted Church needed six labels from Melnychuk, one each for its Lemberger, Chardonnay, Riesling, Merlot/Cabernet, Vineyard Selection and Pinot Blanc. Each label would tell a different slice of the church’s explosive dismantling and reconstruction, but it wouldn’t be a strictly continuous story, lest a store run out of a particular wine and interrupt the tale. “We want to break the mold of traditional wine labels,” wrote Bernie in his detailed briefing, which included photographs Evelyn had taken of the church, inside and out, and some of his own roughly drawn compositions, with stick men to indicate the overall arc of the story.

Melnchuk, a 1995 graduate of the Sheridan College of Art in Oakville, Ontario, was thrilled. She’d earn a sweet \$5,000 fee for a project she could complete in two weeks and yet with a shelf life of several years, as opposed to the single day of editorial work for a newspaper. Throughout, the Campbells were hands-off. “It was my call,” says Bernie. “Total freedom. This usually never happens with a client. But they gave me my freedom and I gave Monica hers.”

To a degree. There were two or three versions of each label before Bernie was satisfied, and there was considerable re-jiggling for labels three and four: “We were going to have a before-and-after scene, with



powder and dust everywhere, but it began to evoke too much of the feeling of 9/11 in New York. A bomb. Religion. The doodles didn't look right, and we struggled with it for a while."

The Launch

The Campbells sent out invitations to a party celebrating their new acquisition. On July 13, 2002 with 70 or so friends, family and Okanagan Falls residents watching, (including those attending the 'blasted' church in question), Evelyn stood up, announced the new name and displayed mockups of the bottles. "I can't say there was a rah-rah mood," Bernie recalls. "Some people loved it. Some held back. Some of the congregation were aghast."

Even Bernie was having momentary doubts. Eight out of 10 people he bounced the name off expressed reservations, but he clung to his vision with "sheer stubbornness," dismissing objections the way he writes off most focus group results. "When you ask an opinion, most people will refer to current experience. What to name a winery? They'll give you the

'creek' idea, or the 'mountain'. Focus groups will dilute your idea to pabulum, if you let them."

Eventually Bernie simply stopped telling people the new name. He derived some consolation from his father-in-law, a retired professor of language and religion at University of Victoria, who sent him an email that summer before the launch. "I have just finished speaking by phone with my friend Fraser Berry, the retired Bishop of Kootenay [in the Okanagan]," said the dad-in-law. "He thoroughly enjoyed the idea of being served a wine called Blasted Church. Yes, indeed, he endorsed the idea – providing it were good wine!"

And that, when all was said and done, clever label or not, would be the deciding factor.

By the first week of August, five of the wines were bottled, labeled and ready for market.

In Vino, Veritas

On August 16 Bernie loaded up his Ford Explorer with 30 cases of wine and made what he says can only be termed "a

pilgrimage, a diplomatic mission" to Sooke Harbour House on Vancouver Island. Thanks to the discernment of owner Sinclair Philip, Sooke Harbour House is a perennial award-winner in *Wine Spectator* magazine. Bernie reasoned that a positive response from Philip would constitute a huge boost of insider confidence; the jungle drums among sommeliers would start beating, and Blasted Church would get listed by the right restaurants all the way to Whistler. Notes Bernie: remember, this was still Dan Prpich's wine."

So what happened to the protocol that a vintner not put his or her own permanent label on wine made by another? It was quietly ditched. What with all the oddities so far, the Campbells and Bernie decided to cut out the intermediary step and go with the one permanent name. Also, had it flopped, they could then go on to a second name, blithely acting as if it had been in the works all along.

It was supposed to be a quick 15-minute meeting. Instead, it morphed into an hour and a half, with Bernie, Philip and his sommelier, and then a waiter or two, all sitting around a table sampling Blasted Church. "Sinclair bought all 30 cases, right on the spot, plus more Pinot Blanc than I had in the car. He was joking when he said 'This is a \$70 wine – \$30 for the liquid and \$40 for the label' – but it was a great compliment to what we'd done. Driving back that night to Victoria, my car empty of wine, I called Evelyn. I said, 'Guys, we're going to be fine.'"

The Aftermath

Heading into autumn, Blasted Church started getting noticed. Broadcasters such as Jurgen Gothe gave the labels a rave review (and said nice things about the wine). The labels began to win graphic-design awards. Restaurants that wouldn't have given a Prpich Hills rep the time of day started listing Blasted Church. Then came the letter they had been dreading.

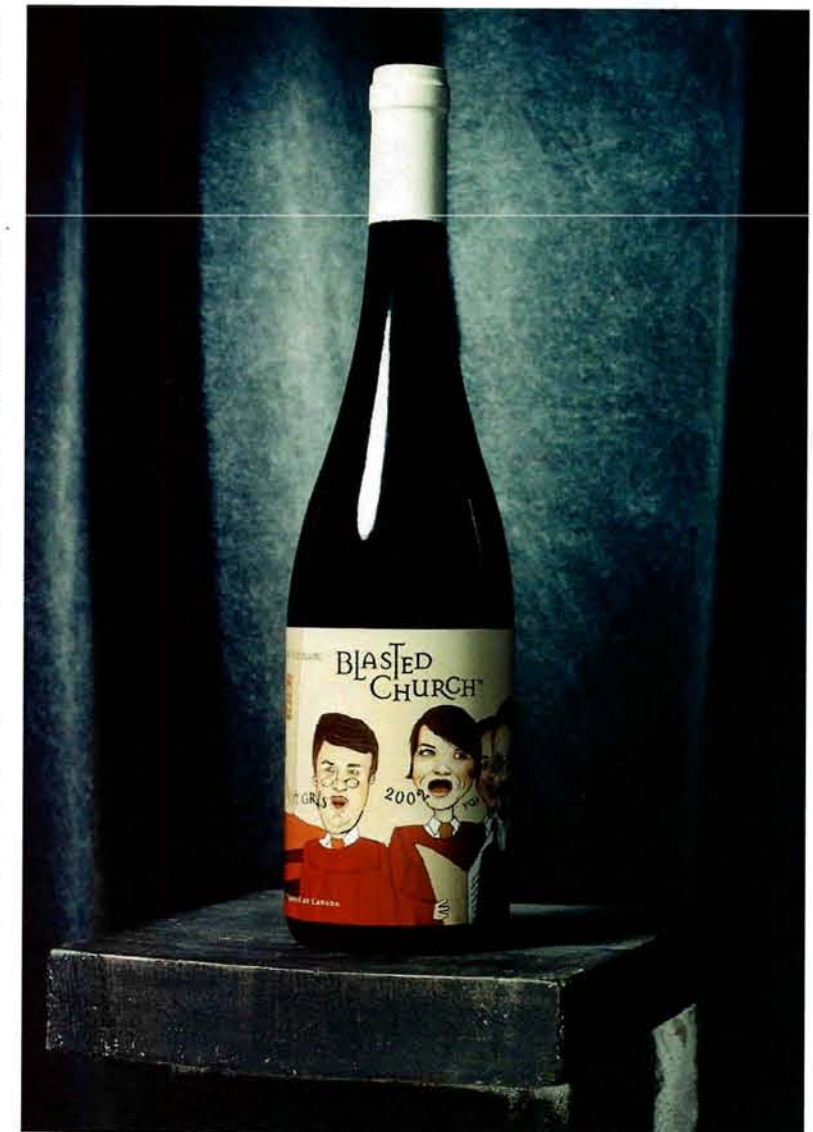
On Okanagan Falls United Church letterhead, the secretary of the board wrote to express the congregation's extreme disappointment at the "shameful act" Bernie and the Campbells had committed. There wasn't much that could be done.

PHOENIX TALE: From the rubble of a steeple, a brand is born

The wine was out there. The blue sign out on Highway 97 had been changed from Prpich Hills to Blasted Church. All Chris and Evelyn could do, with Bernie's input, was draft a prompt, conciliatory reply to soothe feathers ruffled.

And after all, the bottom line is, it's the bottom line that matters. On a typical weekend day in May, 2002, Prpich Hills sold about \$200 worth of wine from its little-visited on-site winery. On a weekend day exactly one year later, Blasted Church moved \$4,000 worth.

So much for a damned name. ■



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