

How new friends in high places saved a B.C. winery

By JOHN T.D. KEYES
in Vancouver

David and Liz Avery own a four-hectare organic vineyard and boutique winery near Abbotsford, B.C., and a big reason it was still struggling after six years was that they named it after themselves — Avery — then decided it would be clever to insert an apostrophe between the A and V, as in A'Very Fine Winery.

Hmm. A duly chastened David Avery today accepts it was a bad move: "Someone had to explain the name to each customer, and there's only Liz and me."

Enter Bernie Hadley-Beauregard, a Vancouver marketing dynamo. The A'Very problem was right up his alley. Indeed, two years before, he'd taken a vowel-deprived Okanagan winery named Prpich Hills, renamed it Blasted Church and designed some catchy labels.

He decided A'Very Fine Winery would sell a lot more fine wine if it were renamed Lotusland, with labels for its various wines that had a people, places and things theme that would evoke Greater Vancouver. Places, for example, would be the Burrard Street Bridge and the Playland roller-coaster. Things would include softwood lumber and totem poles.

And, most intriguingly, Hadley-Beauregard decided to find 20 or so prominent British Columbians who would lend their names to the winery — for no financial remuneration. Zero.

Getting these celebrities on board would be tricky. "These

people hire people to keep people like me away from them," he says. So he sent out a cleverly sycophantic e-mail that began, "I feel rather sheepish writing to you about this request as it is rather insignificant relative to the issues and initiatives that you face everyday. Still, I am hoping that you might take a few minutes..."

Warming to his task, he explained he wanted people "who have added colour, significance and folklore to the city of Vancouver. I sincerely believe that you ..." etc. etc. Having flattered them, he next introduced Lotusland (which in fact didn't exist at that point).

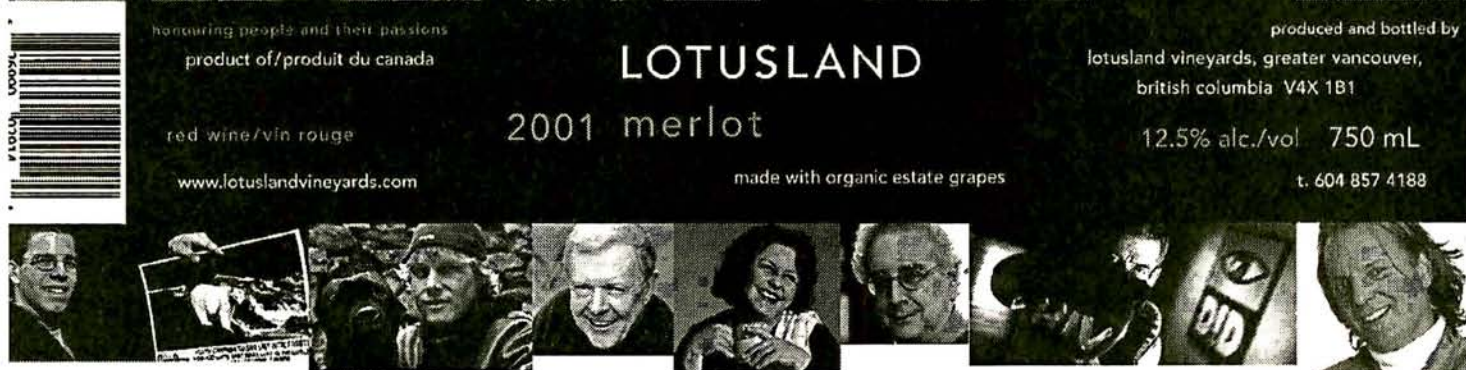
So how did he do?

First up was Paul Watson, co-founder of Greenpeace, currently of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Watson replied by e-mail the same day: "I would be honoured and I agree in principle."

Gee, thought Hadley-Beauregard, this might not be so hard (a thought that prompted him to invite the CBC business show, *Venture*, to come along for the ride. The segment will be shown tomorrow).

Some calls and e-mails went more smoothly than others. David Suzuki was tricky. "He does not respond to e-mail requests," the marketer says. "You have to fax to him. So, you have to use up our natural resources to communicate with this environmentalist. What's that all about?"

At a chi-chi art gallery opening, he discussed the idea with architect Arthur Erickson, who by re-



Twenty-one prominent British Columbians agreed to lend their names and faces to the Lotusland wine label at no charge.

turn e-mail had already said, "Why the hell wouldn't I do it?"

That same evening, Hadley-Beauregard says, "Vicki Gabereau said yes and Douglas Coupland was interested." Gabereau stayed the course, but even after a wine tasting at Coupland's home — "He was the only guy to ask to taste the wine," Hadley-Beauregard notes — and a slew of back-and-forth e-mails, Coupland declined. "I'm going to have to pass," he wrote in mid-October. "My editor feels very strongly about this, and it's a primary relationship in my life, so I'd best not tamper with it."

Similarly, Timothy Taylor, au-

thor of *Stanley Park*, deferred to his agent. "Agent advice is what my guy is there for and, particularly when he's emphatic, I listen to him."

Singer Bif Naked's manager, Peter Karroll, spoke for his client: "I've decided that it's not the direction that I'm going with Bif Naked at this time." (Maybe Hadley-Beauregard's e-mail should not have begun, "Dear Madame Naked...")

He certainly covered a lot of ground. "We appreciate your kind invitation," said a functionary in tycoon Li Ka-shing's office in Hong Kong, "but regret to say that Mr. Li prefers to maintain a low profile and will not be able to ac-

commodate your request."

The marketer was smart. If a celebrity was wavering, he'd drop the name of an equally famous person who had said yes. So by the time he fired off an e-mail to former prime minister Kim Campbell at Harvard University, he was able to invoke the names of former B.C. premier Mike Harcourt, artist Joe Average, footwear designer John Fluevog, and the estate of the late AIDS activist Dr. Peter Jepson-Young. Forest fires had been raging all summer in the Okanagan, so Campbell agreed, her assistant replied, in part because "it would be a show of support for the B.C. wine industry."

In the end, he got 21 names for the label of the first Lotusland Merlot, which will be available this spring. About 80% of the winery's 2004 production is spoken for by restaurants and specialty wine stores — and the bank won't be locking the doors at Lotusland after all.

He hopes to make the People label an annual event, with a new set of faces next year. Maybe the stick-in-the-muds — he invited 70 people to lend their names and faces to the project — will change their minds when they see the finished product. If not, he says, the West Coast has no shortage of illustrious names.

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