

taste



WHEN THE NAME *Blasted Church* was tested, 'nine out of 10 said don't do it.' Today the winery can hardly keep up with the demand.

## Blasting away bottle snobbery

**Bernie Hadley-Beaugard of Vancouver is creating a buzz in the world of wine labels**

**BY AMY ROSEN** • Wine labels are having their moment, and among those who create them, Bernie Hadley-Beaugard, head of Brandever Strategy of Vancouver, has been labelled the best. At June's San Francisco International Wine Competition, Brandever took seven of the eight highest awards for wine label designs, an unprecedented landslide in the label category of the 25-year-old annual competition. "I think there's been an awakening to the fact that the status quo [the naming protocol of the past] has not been working very well," says Hadley-Beaugard, the creative mind behind such B.C. labels as *Blasted Church*, *Laughing Stock*, *Therapy Vineyards* and *Dirty Laundry*. He's right: people once fearful of wine's hoity-toity exteriors evoking family names and scenic vineyards are quaffing concepts that are cheeky and approachable: hello, *Fat Bastard*.

Not everyone is thrilled. "Wine labels have become the vinous equivalent of rap music," says Tony Aspler, author of *The Wine Atlas of Canada*, to be published this fall. "There was a time when the wine in the bottle was what mattered; today it seems the marketers have taken over from the winemakers." Still, as wine becomes more like a fashion product, the challenge for vintners is in finding a concept that has longevity—they don't want their 2004 vintages to come and go like last year's silver sequined leggings.

Animals have had their starring turn. The trend started with the runaway success of the Australian Yellow Tail brand, which launched a few years back and now sells millions of cases a year. So-called critter labels (rabbits, wallabies, you name it) are now so ubiquitous there are rumours that some Canadian liquor boards have put an unofficial freeze on

bringing any more of them in: there's no longer any point of differentiation.

And that's where the wine labelling stars come in. In the U.S., Bonny Doon Vineyard has created brands like *Riesling Asylum*; then there are the creative in-house designs of Don Sebastiani & Sons with their *Screw Kappa Napa* and *Smoking Loon* labels. That said, design studios focused on one specific category, like wine packaging, are rare. In fact, Brandever may be Canada's sole design studio dedicated to wine labels.

One of the company's projects was the award-winning labels of *Blasted Church*. Under previous owners, with the moniker *Prpich Hills*, the winery had trouble selling 1,000 cases a year at \$8.50 per bottle. Today, *Blasted Church* can hardly keep up with the demand; the winery produces 10,000 cases a year, with a price range of \$16 to \$26 a bottle. "I went through the process of researching and visiting Okanagan Falls [where the winery is located]," says Hadley-Beaugard, who is both a brand strategist and a creative designer. He met with a volunteer at the local museum, and asked her if she knew of any quirky stories relating to the town's history. After much prodding she finally said, "Well...there is this dynamite church." It seems a church from a neighbouring community had been taken down with the help of explosives

to loosen the nails and moved to Okanagan in 1929. "Has anyone ever called this church *Blasted Church*?" Hadley-Beaugard asked. "As soon as I said that, her lips pursed and she said 'no' quite disapprovingly. And I knew I had the name." The new vineyard owners were all for it, but "when I first showed the concept to an extended group of people, nine out of 10 said don't do it." And then the 10th person called him the next day and changed her yes to a no.

The true story behind another of Hadley-Beaugard's concepts, the label *Dirty Laundry*, is that a mining-era Chinese labourer jumped off the train in Summerland, B.C., and started a Chinese laundry in the village. "He expanded to include a bordello upstairs," says Hadley-Beaugard. "Talk about your perfect business model."

He says these double entendres aren't his only approach, but then why mess with success? *Dirty Laundry*, like *Blasted Church*, has seen enviable sales increases. Under the previous owners (when the vineyard was called *Scherzinger*), it sold some 800 cases a year. After converting to *Dirty Laundry*, the winery's shelves have been stripped bare. Almost overnight the world discovered their wine: suddenly all the best restaurants in Vancouver were clamouring for it, with celebrity chef Rob Feenie of *Lumière* going so far as to say that it's one of the best wines ever to come out of the Okanagan. Funny thing is, nothing had changed but the label. **M**



### TODAY'S SPECIAL...TURKMENISTAN MELONS

The central Asian republic is known for its fabulous melons, and its egotistical, authoritarian president-for-life, Saparmurat Niyazov. To honour the man who calls himself "Chief of All Turkmens," the country has named a melon after him. According to a local food official, the melon is distinguished by "excellent taste and large size." Niyazov himself is chuffed, declaring, "the smell makes your head spin." The melons' smell, that is.