

How Quirky Names Sell Wines

by

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TEN years ago, a British wine merchant slapped a provocative name on a new line of French wines: Fat Bastard.

The shock value worked. Now, this brand can be found in many markets, including British Columbia where the Liquor Distribution Branch lists four Fat Bastards, all at the skinny price of \$17 a bottle.

The name did not exactly make it easy to get into many markets. Several Canadian liquor stores at first refused to list wines whose name has long been a popular swear word. In all cases, the boards relented because quirky names sell wine.

By far the longest home run in the quirky names game has been scored by Australia's [yellow tail]®, a brand launched in the late 1990s by a winery called Casella. Then a small family-run Australian winery, it wanted to get into the booming export market. Casella's export director called up a label broker, flipped through a number of offerings, and picked one made distinctive

by the image of the kangaroo.

It is now one of the largest wine brands in the world. In British Columbia alone, more than \$20 million worth of [yellow tail]® wines are sold annually, in part because the inexpensive wines taste good and in part because it is hard to forget the catchy label.

The success of [yellow tail]® spawned a deluge of so-called critter labels, including Arrogant Frog, Elephant on a Tightrope, The Little Penguin, Smoking Loon, Wild Pig, Goats Do Roam and Yard Dog.

To vary the theme, some producers have found other wacky names. California's Donny Sebastiani, owner of Don Sebastiani and Sons, has wines with names like Used Automobile Parts (a blend of red Bordeaux varieties) and Screw Kappa Napa (closed, of course, with a screw cap). There is a popular French label in this market called Red Bicycleette.

These labels, almost always reserved for value-priced wines, are meant to stick in the mind. Consider, for example, two labels from Penfolds of Australia that actually compete in this market: Rawson's Retreat, a traditionally-styled label and

The Little Penguin, a critter label.

In the Okanagan this spring, Calgarians Bruno Kelle and Stella Schmidt took that lesson to heart when they bought Wineberg Gersighel, quite possibly the worst-named winery in British Columbia. They changed the name to Golden Beaver, with a label featuring a bucolic beaver. While it is not a name I would have chosen, it still is a big improvement on the former name. And it is a name no one forgets.

Some of the most memorable winery names and labels in British Columbia have been designed by a Vancouver marketer, Bernie Hadley-Beauregard. At the San Francisco International Wine Competition's label design awards this spring, his company, Brandever Design, walked away with four double golds, four silvers and two bronzes for individual labels. The firm also won three double golds, two silvers and two bronzes for label series. No other competitor came anywhere close to Hadley-Beauregard.

His clients include Laughing Stock Vineyards, Hester Creek, Tantalus, Lotusland, Summerhill, Elephant Island, Salt Spring Vineyards and Therapy Vineyards.

The Therapy labels feature simulated Rorschach ink blots or other allusions to psychotherapy. The winery's delightful rosé (quickly sold out) was called Pink Freud while an off-dry white was named Freudian Sip.

One of his greatest successes was the creation of the name and label for Blasted Church Vineyards. The winery originally was named for its founder and called Prpich Hills. Chris and Evelyn Campbell bought the winery four years ago and dumped the unpronounceable Prpich label as fast as they could.

It was not easy. Together with Hadley-Beauregard, they considered something like 400 names. They settled on Blasted Church because there is a wonderful local story behind it. There is a small church still in use in Okanagan Falls that was moved there in 1929 from a ghost town near Oliver. To dismantle the building, the movers set off a small dynamite charge that loosened the nails. The winery embellished the story with a series of bright cartoon labels. The entire package was memorable and sales took off.

Last year, Scherzinger Vineyards at Summerland, which also was named for a founder no longer there,

hired Hadley-Beauregard to design a new name and label. Ron Watkins, who had bought the winery a few years earlier from Edgar Scherzinger, had figured out that there might be a connection between the difficult name and the winery's slow sales.

Once again, the consultant dug out local history. A century or so ago, there was a Chinese laundry in Summerland which really was a front for a brothel. Legend has it that it was called Dirty Laundry.

That became the winery's new name and the labels got an appropriately saucy design. Suddenly, restaurants were phoning, begging for the wine. Watkins was sold out by the fall. This year, the demand for Dirty Laundry was even more frenzied. The winery was sold out by July.

Realizing he needed to build a new winery to meet the demand, Watkins went looking for a partner. The one he found, an Alberta lawyer, bought the entire winery, no doubt turning Watkins into an instant millionaire. It was an unexpected consequence of a very successful name change. And it likely would not have happened if the place had, instead, been renamed Watkins Winery.