

Message in a Bottle: From Blasted Church to Dirty Laundry to Son of a Bitch Pinot Noir, Bernie Hadley-Beauregard and Brandever are changing how wine is being marketed—one bottle at a time

BY JANE GIFFEN • In a fine restaurant, a diner calmly peruses the wine list. Not intimidated by the various appellations, he confidently orders up a bottle of Dirty Laundry Gewurztraminer, content in the knowledge that he will enjoy an exceptional wine blessedly free of hoity-toity wine snobbery. To whom does he owe this reprieve from oenological elitism? One man: Bernie Hadley-Beauregard, the founder of Vancouver's Brandever Marketing Strategy, who has made it his mission to blaze a trail through traditional wine marketing one bottle at a time.

He did not intend to create a niche market in wine branding for his firm. After receiving an MBA from McGill in 1986, Hadley-Beauregard worked for Starbucks Coffee Company and Purdy's Chocolates. He started Brandever in 2001 and wanted to provide clients with all-encompassing branding expertise that went beyond simple design and marketing.

One of his first clients was an unfortunately named winery called Prpich Hills. Although the Okanagan winery had a long-standing reputation, its new owners were faced with abysmal sales. With this client Hadley-Beauregard discovered a new pleasure, sleuthing out local stories that create a persona for the brand. In the case of Prpich Hills, he discovered the story of an old church that was moved from a mining camp to Okanagan Falls. Locals had dismantled the church with the help of a few sticks of dynamite. Thus Blasted Church winery was born. The wine labels featured this event, illustrated by Monika Melnychuk, complete with fuse-wielding priest.

This kind of wine marketing was unheard of in Canada at the time. "Traditionally, wine is sold with a bit of pomp and ceremony. Blasted Church was out in left field," recalls Hadley-Beauregard. "But I was determined that this was going to change the way that wine is looked at." But the Brandever model is not to just come up with a kitschy name and move on. "I communicated to the owner, you don't only create a brand, it's also where you sell it that makes a statement about what kind of wine this is. If you go to a greasy spoon that has that wine available, it makes a

different statement than if you find it at a fine restaurant."

When Blasted Church hit the shelves in 2002, one leading winemaker declared that it would never sell for more than \$8.95 a bottle. "There were a lot of naysayers in the beginning," says Hadley-Beauregard, "but they got very quiet when they saw where sales were going." In the case of Blasted Church, sales for the premium wines jumped tenfold. And most of its bottles are priced in the \$20 range today.

Since then Hadley-Beauregard has worked his magic for wineries across North America and abroad. Organized Crime Winery gets its name not from the mafia but from rival Mennonite congregations in 1930s Niagara, Ont., one of whom stole and destroyed the other's organ. B.C.'s Dirty Laundry Vineyard, formerly Scherzinger Vineyards, takes its name from a story Hadley-Beauregard discovered about a Chinese laundry in Summerland, B.C., which fronted the local cathouse in the early 1900s.

Vineland, Ont., winery Megalomaniac Wines is a prime example of the Brandever combination of research, wit and design savvy. The name points a jocular finger at the personality of owner John Howard. The labels feature surrealist images of a faceless figure. The wine names strike a chord with cognoscenti because they reflect the particular personality traits of the varietals, such as Son of a Bitch Pinot Noir (named for the so-called heartbreak grape).

Buying in to the Brandever treatment is not without risks. Hadley-Beauregard tells prospective clients, "You will have a lot of white-knuckle nights if you do work with us. It's really not about you, it's about the consumer." The method does not rely on traditional research, such as focus groups. "We find that that pulls all the risk out of any new idea that comes out. You can overanalyze. Gut instinct is a remarkable tool."


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Brandever also strives for different approaches in its work for other types of clients, mostly in the food industry. Its wit is evident in the branding of Jealous Fruits, an Okanagan cherry orchard. Eschewing the commonplace beauty shot, this labelling features other "jealous fruits" and their nasty comments about cherries. Interestingly, the type is drawn directly on the actual pears, oranges and bananas. "We are always cool hunting," says Hadley-Beauregard. "Our designer Laurie Millotte found an illustrator in the U.K who actually draws on fruit."


Brandever, described by Hadley-Beauregard as a "virtual firm," stays deliberately small. Millotte joined the firm from her native France three years ago. Office manager Brie Schiller completes the staff. To this he adds an ever-changing roster of freelancers. "When you specialize in a category, the worst thing you can do is have your products all look the same," he notes. "I lose sleep over that one. It's so difficult to achieve if you have the same team. I have to second-guess myself all the time. So we team up with a lot of different suppliers—designers, Web people, graphic designers—whatever the job needs . . . like people who illustrate on fruit." ■


—Jane Giffen is a Barrie, Ont. writer and editor of the *Applied Arts Extra* newsletter.




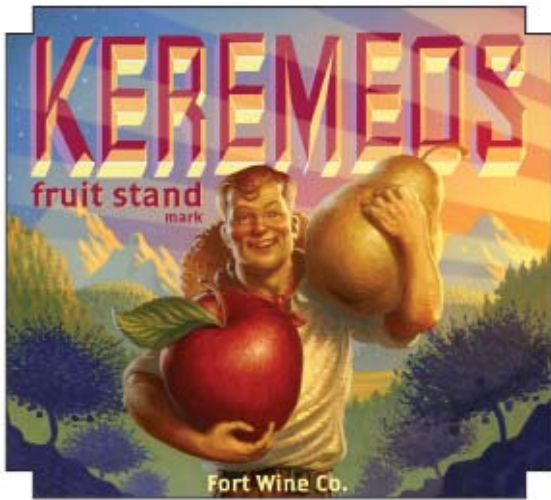

Megalomaniac: Inspired by the larger-than-life persona of Niagara winery owner John Howard, Megalomaniac earned Brandever a prestigious Gold Award for package design at the London International Awards 2007 and Best of Show for label design at the 2007 San Francisco International Wine Competition. The labels feature a surrealist sensibility, with headless figures and floating hats. The varietal names are pure Brandever: Son of a Bitch Pinot Noir, for example, is named for the difficult personality of the so-called heartbreak grape.




 **Jealous Fruits:** Working on the premise that other fruits would be driven mad with jealousy over the lusciousness of the cherry, Brandever created a brand that brings some much-needed levity to the produce aisle. Each flat of cherries delivered to the store contains eight different fruit labels, so that the consumer will linger around the display to take in the full array of cherry dissing gossip. Unbelievably, the type is not added in Photoshop but drawn directly on the fruit by British illustrator Sarah King.


 **Fort Wine:** The rebranding of the Langley, B.C. Fort Wine Company was launched last summer and features labels that riff on highly collectible 1900s era fruit-crate labels, complete with apple-cheeked fruit harvester (illustrated by Peter Ferguson). The wines also feature the signature Brandever repartee, with names such as Ghost of the Bogs white cranberry, which has a Sleepy Hollow-type illustration by Ryan Heshka.

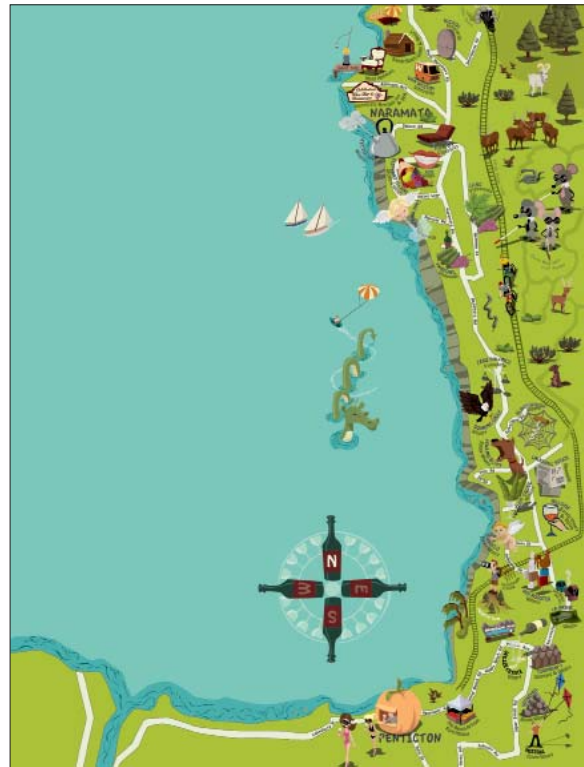
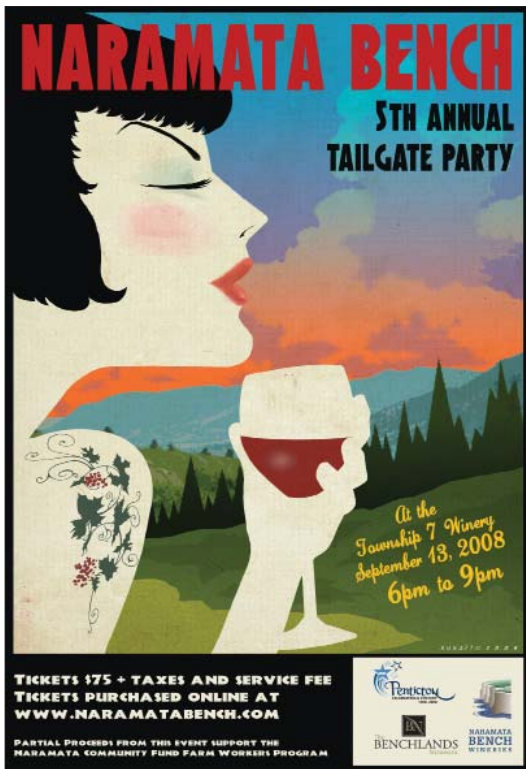
 **Organized Crime:** Not a vintage owned by the Cosa Nostra, the Organized Crime Winery brand refers to a dispute between rival congregations of Mennonites near Beamsville, Ont., which resulted in one group stealing and destroying the other flock's pipe organ. Illustrations for each varietal, by Clare Louise Mallison of the U.K., depict a particular scene of the crime. The logo for the brand itself takes a traditional Mennonite hat and evokes a slightly gangster edginess.





 **Blasted Church:** The brand that changed the face of wine marketing in Canada and launched a niche for Brander, Blasted Church Vineyards started out as the unfortunately named Prpich Hills. As part of its ongoing relationship with Blasted Church, Brander extended the brand into signature events, such as the Midnight Service gospel choir concert, part of the Okanagan Wine Festival, held in the winery's cellar. The label of this wine features unauthorized caricatures of notable wine critics, illustrated by Monica Melnychuk.




 **Dirty Laundry:** You can't research an old Okanagan mining town without finding a brothel story. In this case, the winery's original name, Scherzinger Vineyards, wasn't creating a gold rush for the vintner. The story of an old Chinese laundry that fronted a bawdy house gave rise to a new brand, and a 525 per cent increase in sales. The design tells the tale subtly with a crisp white label with a red-hot iron and embossed swirls of, ahem, steam.



 **Stage Left:** The wine brand that tempts you to throw away your day job and, as Bernie Hadley-Beuregard puts it, “lubricate the possibilities with a glass of wine,” was inspired by the lives of vintners Melinda Doty and Rich Williams, who left home out east and bought a winery in Paso Robles, Calif.

 **Spit Decisions:** Serious wine tasters make a habit of spitting out each sample, lest they become inebriated during prolonged sessions. Brandever coined the name Spit Decisions Wine Buying Group, for a collective of highly astute connoisseurs who sleuth out international wine discoveries. Not surprisingly the group turned to Brandever to brand its first endeavor, Whatchmacallit, a wine series sold exclusively to restaurants. Next up, Spit Decisions challenged Brandever to come up with an endorsement for Cline Cellars. Rather than make a logo showing the group’s endorsement, Brandever wrote the reasons for its recommendation over the entire bottle.

 **Naramata Bench:** The Naramata Bench is considered ground zero for grape growing and winemaking in the Okanagan Valley. Four years ago, Brandever created a long-range marketing plan for the Naramata Bench Wineries Association. One of the keys was to create signature events associated with the area, such as the Tailgate Party in Naramata, a sold-out annual event much loved by wine aficionados. A map to the Naramata wineries has a treasure-map sensibility that leads wine hunters on an amusing tour of area’s oenological treats.