

All That Sparkles

As sparkling wine's popularity increases, so does the diversity of its packaging.

BY LAURA NESS

High-end Champagne houses have always sought to differentiate their products with packaging evocative of haute couture. Perhaps none is better known for its artistry than Perrier-Jouët, with its hand painted Belle Epoque bottles adorned with anemones that evoke the floral aroma of the house style.

Dom Perignon bottles are so prized that even empty ones are going for serious coin on eBay. The "Luminous Lite Up" series has a button on the bottom to light up the label in the dark. Empty bottles of pretty much any Champagne can be found there selling for hundreds of dollars.



With bubbles' undeniable rise in popularity in just the last five years, new as well as established brands are looking for ways to set their products apart.

In California, there are more than 80 producers of sparkling wine or Champagne (those who are grandfathered to use the name on their labels include Korbel), and they're approaching 10 million cases annually. Unsurprisingly, given the flagrant spending habits — and power — of Californians, more bubbles are consumed there than anywhere else in the United States: More than 4 million cases each year. Illinois is a close second, followed by New York, Florida, Texas,

Unsworth Vineyards uses silk screening and foregoes foil wrap on the cork cage.

Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Ohio.

In the United Kingdom, sparkling wine sales for 2016 soared past the £1 billion mark for the first time, with retail sales up 20% and direct sales up more than 50% by volume. It's fair to say that sparkling is the hottest thing next to climate change.

Italy has scored a winner with Prosecco, as it now accounts for more than half the sparkling retail market in the United Kingdom alone. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom's own sparkling efforts just foiled French judges in a competition where an English sparkling called Nyetimber bested classic French Champagne entries. And the elite French Champagne house Taittinger is in the process of setting up production in the United Kingdom.

With women making more purchasing decisions (more than 80% of wine purchases are made by them), it's no wonder Prosecco tops the list as the fastest-growing wine segment in the United States as well, with an increase of nearly 35% in 2015 over 2014. Nearly a third of those purchasing Prosecco last year did so for the first time, having not previously bought sparkling. Could it prove the "gateway wine" to high-end sparkling, even Champagne?

Regardless of how consumers are getting their bubbles (in splits, cans, cleverly wrapped bottles, works of art that remain valuable long after the liquid is

gone), we point to the outrageous Armand de Brignac Brut Gold "Ace of Spades," a lavishly gold-plated Champagne that retails for \$35,000 for a 15 L Nebuchadnezzar — they're drinking more of it, and the options for presentation will continue to multiply along with the choice of what's inside.

SINGLE SERVINGS MULTIPLY

Nowhere is packaging more critical than in selling sparkling: it helps communicate the message of the wine inside. According to the Wine Market Council's 2016 research, when women were asked about labels, almost half preferred "traditional/classic/sophisticated" designs, although nearly 40% also responded well to "fun and fanciful."

Classic, tasteful labels still rule the category (think Roederer, Mumm, Schramsberg), although silkscreen, etching and full bottle wraps are becoming more popular.

Size matters. And tiny bottles of bubbles like the 187 mL Moscato or Brut Cuvee sparklers from Barefoot can be found at Safeway or on Amazon, along with Chandon's mini classic brut and rosé offerings. Like Korbel's stylish minis, they make great wedding favors. Coppola's *Sofia*, an effervescent Blanc de Blancs, comes in stylish pink 187 mL cans that can be had as a four-pack in a decorative pink box.

Then there's Cangria, from the O'Neill Vineyard in California's Central Valley, whose red and white Sangria options come in eye candy cans. The website appeals to those who want to kick tradition squarely between the teeth with its #Start-Something message, which reads: "The routine. What's 'expected.' The path chosen for you. The fifth night in, in a row. Drinking beer, again. That Friday night you had last week and the week before and the week before that you're having tonight, again. The job you hate. The friends who bring you down. The haters. Bullies and bitches. The low-risk life. The traps and status quo. Screw 'em all. Life can be way

AT A GLANCE

- + Sparkling wine is more popular than ever.
- + Brands are employing innovative packaging to stand out.
- + Single-serve packages, full wraps and alternative closures abound.
- + Expressing what's in the bottle is key.

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more awesome than that. So grab a can or 10 and Start Something.”

One brand that might not appeal to women is Mancan, carbonated white “wine with fizz” available in 375 mL cans on Amazon. It’s emblazoned with the image of a dog and a firehouse. Does sparkling in cans have a future?

THE FULL WRAP

One of the dominant brands on supermarket shelves, Chandon, was quick to jump on the full-sleeve wrap, employing digitally printed heat-shrink sleeves that envelop the entire bottle. Two designs appeared on store shelves in June called Limited Edition American Summer, featuring a red, white and blue stripe design for the brut and a red, white and pink version for the rosé. The bottles immerse in ice buckets with no muss, no fuss.

Arguably the oldest continuously producing Champagne house



Eye-catching, full-sleeve wraps are popular for limited-edition bottlings.

in the United States, Korbel has been making its bubbly for 130 years according to the traditional *méthode Champenoise*. Most Kor-

bel Champagnes are done in traditional bottles with labels, but every once in a while, a special occasion brings out a full sleeve wrap, as

CA

“There was no need for this - he stopped by this AM and got it humming again. I wanted to pass this along because I’ve seen Tony a number of times since I got into the industry in 2008,”

*Alex Mossman, Asst Winemaker
Italics Wine
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was the case this summer, when the blue and white bottle with a sky full of stars debuted on grocery store shelves.

SIMPLE ELEGANCE IN LABELS

Chloe, one of several Wine Group brands, sources and bottles its hot-selling Prosecco in Italy, setting it off in a unique bottle with a distinctive black bow on the label. Says Belinda Harcombe, associate brand manager for Chloe, "The Chloe design portrays all that's elegant and timeless. The memorable black ribbon motif delivers a strong presence on the shelf, and ensures high consumer recall. Chloe is the embodiment of classic beauty, bottled."



The elegant black bow on Chloe Prosecco bottles creates high consumer recall.

Scott Caraccioli of Caraccioli Cellars in the Santa Lucia Highlands hired a serious sparkling expert, Frenchman Michel Salgues, who

spent 20 years at Roederer in Anderson Valley, to craft the winery's Pinot Noir and Chardonnay sparklers in the true *méthode Champenoise*.

"When designing our sparkling wine package, the family's main goal was to create a timeless, current feel that would match the elegance in the bottle. Creating a cohesive and homogenous branding experience for our customer is of upmost importance. The heavy bottle, thin, dark label and seal that drops from the foil all combine to create an experience that's distinctly Caraccioli."



Caraccioli Cellars' packaging creates a timeless feel.

Steorra is Joe Wagner's first sparkling venture, and to present this creamy lemon and lime sherbet-like beverage crafted from Russian River Valley Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, he chose a tasteful embossed label and a box subtly silkscreened with stars and embossed with a copper metallic logo.

The name "Steorra" comes from an Old English word for star: It's a nice touch, and a nod to that famous quote often attributed to the venerable Dom Perignon, who

allegedly created the first blended Champagne, "Come quickly! I am tamping the stars!"

Perhaps one of the formerly best-kept secrets in the sparkling world is Rack & Riddle. It produces custom sparklings of every hue for many a winery: If it tastes really good, and is priced somewhere between \$25 and \$45 per bottle, it probably came from there.

It's planning to launch its own brand, 6 Bar, a nod to the "6 bar" of pressure in a bottle of sparkling wine. It created an eye-catching label with large, colorful typography and a bit of a twist.

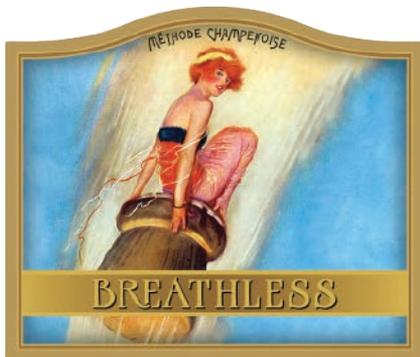
General Manager Mark Garaventa says of the large scannable barcode on the front label, "There are 12 fun, 'secret' messages in every case of 6 Bar wine." It was created with brokers, retailers and restaurateurs in mind, with a resale price of between \$10.99 and \$12.99.

One of Rack & Riddle's poster children is Breathless, a brand created by the three Faust sisters, who are part of the Rack & Riddle team. Their label, which was awarded Most Whimsical Wine Label at the 2014 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, actually took a while to bring to fruition.

Cynthia Faust shares her story of dealing with designers here. She was glad she didn't hold her breath: "Whether or not you're creative, choosing designers to get all your assets created and branded is absolutely vital. We went to a couple designers, and the mockups they came back with were all so far off the mark, it wasn't even close to what we were thinking."

Eventually, they found a great firm to work with: 4Parts Design, out of Sausalito. Faust says if you don't like what you're seeing from the designer you're working with, don't settle: It's too important. "Look at beautiful labels you admire and figure out who owns the brand. Oftentimes, they'll share the name of the designer."

Travis Pollard of Paragon Label, who prints the Breathless label for the Faust sisters, credits Rack & Riddle with making sparkling wine more accessible to a broader market



Rack & Riddle's Breathless labels are designed by 4Parts Design in Sausalito.

of consumers. "They're enabling wineries to extend their portfolios to include sparkling and, at the same time, their brands," he says.

Paragon Label is based in Petaluma, Calif., and runs five Flexo presses, two HP digital presses, a one-of-a-kind laser-cutting system that's proving highly popular with the growing spirits brands, as well as state-of-the-art foil and embossing presses.

One of its largest sparkling customers is Iron Horse, for whom Paragon produces labels using many different processes, including sculptured embossing, metallic ink and prismatic foils.

Embossing involves creating a die of metal, into which the design is etched with a dremel tool. Paul De Crevel of De Crevel Stamping & Embossing Dies in Napa is Paragon's go-to creator for dies: He did the image of the embossed horse that appears on Iron Horse labels.

Almost all the Iron Horse labels use metallic ink, which are done using a flexographic or offset printer, due to the high volumes being printed. Examples include the Cuvee 50, imprinted in silver with a football leather-like embossed background, and the flashy, bright orange with gold imprint of the 2012 Summer's Cuvée, done with a prismatic foil called "Pillars of Light" for a look as blinding as a hot summer afternoon on the beach.

Iron Horse's Silver Moon label uses the prismatic method of laser etching on a prismatic foil, which catches the light and has the appearance of a hologram.

For smaller producers (less than 5,000 cases), Pollard recommends digital printing, which consumes less resources during setup — about 50 to 200 feet of paper to print digital vs. 1,000 to 2,000 feet required during setup on a flexographic or offset printer. You can then use foil stamping to achieve the desired effect.



Iron Horse's Silver Moon label uses the prismatic method of laser etching on a prismatic foil, which catches the light and has the appearance of a hologram.

Of utmost importance for sparkling wine labels, says Pollard, is the ability to resist water in the dreaded ice bucket. He recommends using "Ever Opaque" label stock from Wausau Coated Products.

In the case of Carmody McKnight, on the far west side of Paso Robles, every label starts as a painting by renowned artist and TV actor, Gary Conway. When his daughter, Kathleen, decided to

take the plunge and make *méthode Champenoise* sparkling for the turn of the century (remember Y2K?), she delivered each bottle with an original canvas painting glued to it. Going forward, as she expanded her sparkling line into citron and pomegranate, Gary created hand painted labels to reflect the spirit of each flavor.

BEYOND THE LABEL

Screen printing, also called silk-screening or glass printing, is the best way to ditch the ice bucket worries and create a look that goes beyond the label. The process is achieved using Applied Ceramic Labels (ACL), which are actually baked into the surface of the glass, creating a durable look that really stands out on store shelves and has none of the downsides of printed labels.

Waterloo Container out of New York offers many pressure-rated glass options for sparkling and recently announced state-of-the-art glass printing. Employing a leading-edge Servo technology that's much faster and more accurate than manual registration methods, it offers unparalleled accuracy with a single pass. Eight vibrant colors can be printed at once, allowing designers to go wild with creativity. Art can be wrapped completely around the bottle and UV cured inks offer exceptional design possibility and durability. Waterloo also offers the unique ability to reverse print, creating a design that's visible inside the bottle as the beverage is poured.

Bobbi Stebbins, sales and marketing project leader at Waterloo, says, "Printed bottles replace many of the steps involved with paper labeling, reducing labor costs and time, and you only purchase the bottles you'll actually use. Any breakage will not affect other bottles in the case and bottles are delivered to the customer, ready to fill."

It recently completed a bottle example (see photo next column), using its W25 flat-bottomed pressure bottle, which is rated for up to

five volumes of pressure. No set up charges apply for bottle styles it's already tooled, which includes 55 of its popular inventory items.



Waterloo's St. Laurent example uses a W25 flat-bottomed pressure bottle, which is rated for up to five volumes of pressure.

Monvera Glass Décor in Richmond, Calif., specializes in ACL and UV screen printing. The latter enables four-color process designs to be reproduced with photographic quality, so photos, gradients and halftones can be directly printed on bottles instead of on paper labels. Because UV inks are cured using UV lamps, UV printing offers a very low carbon footprint, too.

Screen printing allows up to six colors to be applied directly to glass, from neck to bottom, for a 360-degree storytelling option.

Monvera specializes in both neck printing and shoulder printing: The former lets you skip the foil/capsule and the latter really creates a dramatic look, as shown in the Lichen Estate sparkling wines. Carter Estate out of Temecula employs silk screening, including precious metal inks, on all of its sparkling wines for a handsome and distinguished finish. Caitriona Anderson, vice president of sales and marketing for Monvera, says screen printing is a great way to differentiate high-end and reserve wines and also help value wines stand out



Monvera Glass Décor specializes in silk screening, shown here on Carter Estate and Lichen Estate sparklings.



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from the competition — the company will screen as few as 100 cases for new clients.

Quest Industries in Stockton, Calif., offers extensive custom finishing methods to make bottles stand out, including a spray frost that mimics the look of etched glass without the use of harsh chemicals, and an elegant black coating process available in matte, glossy and frosted finishes.

Quest's director of sales and marketing, Dennis Sones, notes most bottles feature labels with a "belly dancer" approach: They focus your eye on the middle of the bottle. "Why not treat the whole bottle as a canvas?" he asks.

The company recently experimented with three new finishing techniques, each on a popular Saver Champagne bottle called "Heritage," which sports a slim neckline and dramatically broad base with a deep punt.

"Dream Chrome" is a metallic coating that creates a highly reflective, mirror-like finish. When combined with a top coating, it gives each bottle a unique color and a sleek, high-end appearance.

With "Crackle Décor," sensual textures can be added to any bottle, inviting consumers to pick it up and take a closer look. Available in a variety of colors and combined with its frost formulation, it can enhance colored glass.

"Spray Mask" recently won the most innovative award at the August 2016 Wines and Vines Packaging Conference in Yountville. This allows for intricate designs to be masked out, while the entire bottle, including the punt, is sprayed. "Think about painting just the bottom of the bottle gold," says Sones. "When you open it, the bubbles will look like they're rising from a field of gold. The entire bottle is on display at 'the moment of truth.'"

DECADENCE FROM ATTAINABLE TO SUBLIME

Few know how to present wine as art as well as Frenchman-turned-California-wine-mogul Jean Charles Boisset. His sparkling collection, which brings together Old and New World winemaking, uses numbers to tell stories.

"Each wine in the collection is a limited edition, and is 'named' with a number. These numbers signify a wine style that we strive to achieve vintage to vintage, while also symbolizing important ideas, passions and moments in my life," shares Boisset.

The two flagship wines in the series, JCB No. 21 Crémant de Bourgogne Sparkling Brut and JCB No. 69 Crémant de Bourgogne Sparkling Rosé, both \$25, exemplify the style of the JCB brand and lifestyle. Their sleek, understated black labels are a nod to Chanel.

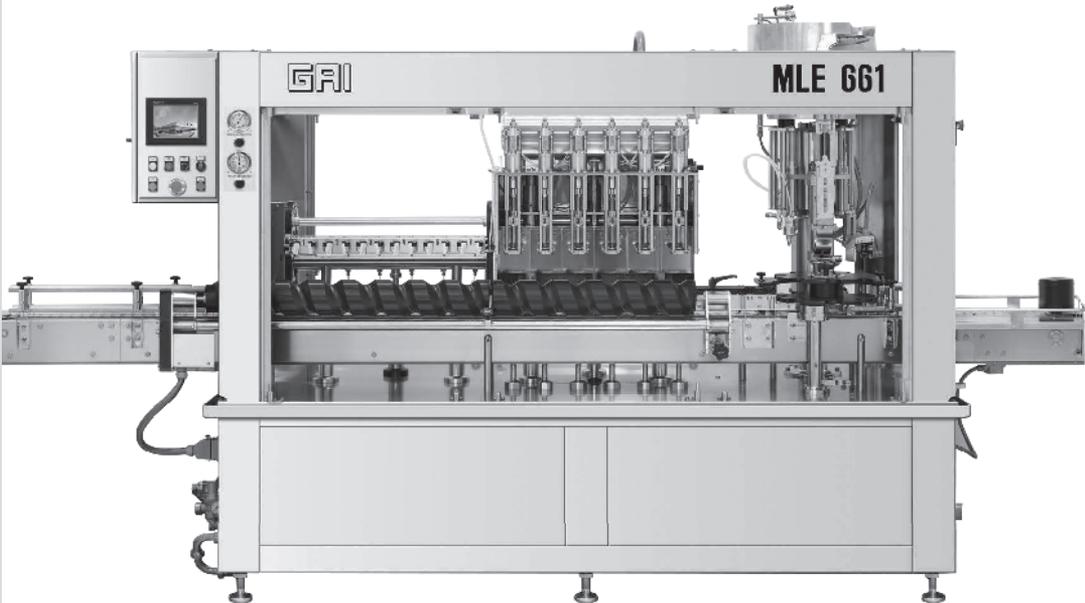
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Boisset admits it all started with 1969, the year of his birth. He says, “No. 69 — does it really need explanation? It’s the year mankind went

Boisset also recently released the very first French Champagne bottled and labeled by a California winery. Buena Vista Winery “La Vic-

toire” Champagne (\$50) is adorned with an eagle symbolizing America, strength and victory. For Boisset, “It also celebrates the triumph of collaboration between California and Champagne.”



Each bottling in JCB’s lineup of sparkling wines is a limited edition.

to the moon! It’s a symbol of expression, freedom, creativity, intellectual revolution, artistry and refinement. Of course, No. 69 is also a Pinot Noir Brut Rosé that entwines masculinity and femininity.”

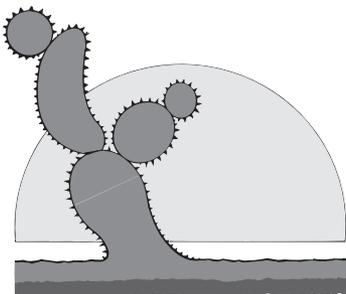
The JCB No.13 Crémant de Bourgogne Sparkling Rosé, \$75, is served in a beautifully curved bottle with grapevines molded right into the base. The shape is completely unique to the JCB Sparkling Collection and the bright burgundy-rose foil sets it off.

Adorned with a gorgeous metallic emerald green infinity symbol, the JCB Infinity Crémant de Bourgogne Sparkling Brut (\$65) is the first organic sparkling wine in the entire Boisset collection. Boisset says the infinity symbol speaks to the magnetic, cosmic and telluric forces that went into the creation of this wine.

At the top of the pyramid is the JCB #50 Crémant de Bourgogne Sparkling Brut (\$200), created in celebration of JCB’s sister Nathalie’s 50th birthday — and perfectly timed with the celebration of Super Bowl 50. It comes in a sleek, black box with dramatic gold-foil stamping.

GOING SIMPLER, GREENER AND LEANER

Going from the superlative to the simple, winemaker Denis Hoey of Odonata, based in Santa Lucia Highlands, decided to forego all the hoopla and expense of cork and wire, plus the litter of capsules and foil. Instead, he simply bottle caps each one. He’s not worried about shelf appeal, as he mostly sells DTC out of his two tasting rooms. A client of his, Stephanie McFarland of McFarland Wines, chose the same closure for her newly released sparkling Riesling, a 2014 Blanc de Blanc.



St. Patrick's of Texas

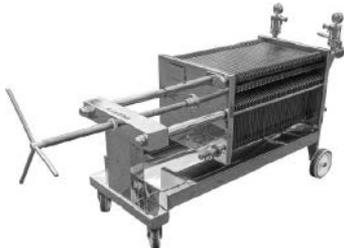
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McFarland Wines' 2014 Blanc de Blanc uses a bottle cap closure.

Losing the foil over the top of the cork cage is also catching on with larger producers, too. New Mexico's Gruet went this route with its "Sauvage" Blanc de Blanc, emphasizing the raw nature of the product.

A Canadian brand, Unsworth Vineyards, also opted for spending money on silk screening its artwork, eschewing the foil wrap on the cork cage. Its Charme d L'île is done in an elegant frosted white bottle, adorned with artwork created by Hired Guns Creative out of British Columbia. Who needs foil?

Marty Mathis of Kathryn Kennedy (Santa Cruz Mountains) also opted out of the foil closure, putting a small sticker on the top of the cap of his 2004 Cuvee Twenty Seven Blanc de Blanc, a nod to his mother, Kathryn Kennedy's, birth year

(1927). The exquisite bottle sports an emblem depicting the seasons of the grapevine molded right into it for a custom look that's hard to beat.

No matter how fancy the packaging may be, you can always elect to make a special bottle even more precious. Engraved Letter in Agoura Hills, Calif., specializes in gold and silver etching of its large selection of premium Champagnes with your original artwork — imagination is your only limit.

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Laura Ness, aka "Her Vine-Ness," is a wine journalist and critic who judges a variety of wine competitions and writes regularly for consumer and trade publications, including *WineOh.TV*.

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