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REPORTS ON THE
IMPORTANCE OF
PACKAGING DESIGN TO
THE FORTUNES OF ANY
DRINKS PRODUCT

The proliferation of new products in many of the biggest international drinks markets over recent years has made pack design more important than ever for brand owners – as well as the retailers and hospitality venues that sell their products.

A great look can hold the key to recruiting consumers, building loyalty and providing the recall and recognition that produces repeat purchases.

"Packaging is hugely important," says Dawn Davies MW, head buyer at UK-based distribution company Speciality Drinks and its retail offshoot The Whisky Exchange. "If you don't get the packaging right you can ruin your brand."

The relationship between consumers and packaging is inherently subjective and difficult to measure and successful designs owe as much to the experience and instincts of the professionals who create them as they do to data-led analysis.

A 2018 report by Wine Intelligence showed that only a third of wine drinkers thought the appeal of a label was important when choosing a wine.

But the organisation said substantial numbers of the remaining two-thirds were likely to be absorbing messages from labels subconsciously, or just did not want to admit to being influenced by packaging.

"People buy with their eyes," says Davies. "Bottega Gold prosecco, for example, is a bling prosecco that flies off the shelf because it's in a gold bottle.

"When Hendrick's gin first came out it was really revolutionary for the category. No one had ever really done gin like that: modern, funky and fun.

"A really good recent example is Isle of Wight Distillery Mermaid gin. It was fine before but they changed it last year and the sales quadrupled because it became more fun, interesting and a little bit different. Packaging can make or break a brand."

Caroline Hagen, founder of British food and drink packaging design specialist Reach, thinks a lot of newer

EYEING SHELF STANDOUT





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Mermaid gin and Bottega prosecco are good examples of standout design

conservative compared to rival drinks such as gin or craft beer.

Designs for the Gaudito range of wines from Catalunya use vibrant colours to create a lively, fun brand identity, while a minimalist label for a rosé wine from the Burgundy producer Louis Jadot retains the essence of the company's tradition while updating it for the modern wine market.

THERE'S USUALLY A SWEET SPOT ALONG THE LINE BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND THE COMMERCIAL ROLE THAT CAN BE HIT

brands on the market are coming up short because they don't devote significant budgets to their overall brand image.

"A lot of start-up food and drink brands do hipster, cookie-cutter designs that are all so similar," she says. "They copy the same ideas and use icon libraries and think putting them together makes a brand. Or they think just using a crazy illustration and putting a tiny description on it will work."

"It doesn't build brands, it doesn't help the consumer and it's not distinctive. Those packs are designed for people who will buy something once because it looks funky."

REFLECTING TRADITION

Reach's alcohol commissions have included Ardmore and Scapa scotch whiskies and O'jos, a range of canned Chilean wines launched last year by Concha y Toro.

The design reflected an alfresco drinking tradition among young Chileans during mountain excursions and incorporated an eye motif in the main brand logo. The brand name comes from a mountain range whose Spanish name translates as 'eyes' in English. Colour-coded labels were used to ease range navigation.

"The aim should always be to be really clear about your consumer and then create a brand with that in mind," Hagen says, considering not just the

look of the pack but how that will carry through into marketing and digital activations.

"In the case of O'jos it was creating something authentically Chilean that reflected a whole new midweek usage occasion for wine," she adds.

Neil Tully MW, founder of wine label design specialist Amphora, says good bottle and label designs have to work on several levels: to be noticeable from several metres away in a bar or shop; to provide effective product information at arm's length to enable consumers to make choices; and to slowly reveal interesting and aesthetically-pleasing details when being drunk to build emotional engagement with the consumer.

"The crucial word is 'balance'," says Tully. "There's usually a sweet spot along the line between aesthetics and the commercial role that can be hit. We've been seeing over the past couple of years a willingness to be commercial about design from brand owners but also to take some braver decisions to push the boundaries when it comes to aesthetics."

The Amphora portfolio demonstrates the way design can create distinct and varied personalities for wines in a category that is frequently thought of as homogenous and



"Wine is a relatively conservative category," Tully acknowledges. "Designers sometimes want to innovate faster than the category is willing to go. But it does sometimes need brave brand owners to push things, to begin to shift perceptions."

The ability to stand out in a crowd is still a major priority for any brand identity. Amphora has a room where it puts clients' designs into a wall of rival products to test this aspect, and Davies at Speciality Brands suggests any new brands coming on to the market should do the same to benchmark themselves against competitors.

"You can have the best-tasting product in the world but it's not going to sell if the packaging's not right," she says. "Sometimes the people behind small brands and start-ups will show their family or their best friend and those people are naturally going to tell them that they love it, but they really need to look at what's out there already and being successful."

Rum producers have been hitting the right note recently in the opinion of Davies, who has praise for Mount Gay's recent update, NPD on The Duppy Share and Plantation's Isle of Fiji "which really pops out on-shelf".

What these and all drinks brands aspire to is ultimately gaining iconic status, when their bottle becomes a category signpost that's instantly recognisable around the world.

"Sometimes that's about longevity, but not always," says Davies. "You could say Rémy Martin Louis XIII cognac is iconic but you could say the same of Tarquin's Cornish gin, with its blue wax neck."

"An iconic design is one where you could take the label off and still instantly tell what the brand is."

» The deadline for the International Spirits Challenge Design & Packaging Awards is June 18. The results will be announced on September 17.