

Wine packaging on the move

Enlisting partners from design to mobile packaging helps wine enthusiast Iain Bolton launch Eight Arms The Tentacle in award-winning sustainable packaging.

By Linda Casey -- *Packaging Digest*, August 2, 2011

With its striking looks, it's hard to believe the packaging for Eight Arms The Tentacle wine starts with a stock package. That is, until you learn about Iain Boltin, the man behind the wine and Eight Arms Cellars, Berkeley, CA. Boltin is a freelance production artist with more than 10 years of agency experience and a strong background in advertising and brand marketing.

Using his knowledge of how to marry art and production, Boltin shepherded his eco-conscious packaging—the bottle is a Eco Series 5511 stock item supplied by **TricorBraun WinePak** (this subsidiary of TricorBraun was formerly known as Caliber WinePak) and manufactured by **Verallia**—to earn a 2010 Clear Choice Award from the Glass Packaging Institute. The winning formula, says Boltin, starts with a design by **John Schall Design** that is screen printed in one-color, full-wrap by **Monvera Glass Décor**.

Facility for dream fulfillment

Despite Boltin's strong background in art and branding, he wouldn't have been able to launch Eight Arms Cellars without partners that could help make and package the product. First and foremost is the crushing facility where Eight Arms Cellars makes The Tentacle-**Winterhawk Winery**, located in California's Suisun Valley.

Winterhawk prides itself on small production artisan wines, with the emphasis on production not packaging. "They don't have any inline bottling equipment there," Boltin explains.

Instead, Winterhawk uses mobile bottlers to provide this service. For packaging The Tentacle, Martha Gustafsson of Winterhawk Winery brought in **Top It Off Bottling**, which joined the California wine-making and bottling scene less than 10 years ago.

"In 2005, when the owners started this business, there were only a handful of mobile bottlers out there," David Crawford, business development manager at Top It Off Bottling, remarks. "The owners, who used to be in the printing business, noticed that the mobile bottlers were all overscheduled." (*Packaging Digest* has reported on the mobile bottling phenomenon with "Bottling on wheels," which was published in the May 2008 issue.) Crawford continues, "They knew the wineries well, and they knew the [specific prospective] customers for the bottling very well." This afforded Top It Off Bottling the luxury of an already identifiable and hungry customer base.

Armed with their printing industry backgrounds, the men (Crawford also boasts a label printing background.) behind Top It Off Bottling were accustomed to working to specific customer requests under strict turnaround times and with customer-specified materials. This helped prepare them for the mobile bottling business, which involves an intimate understanding of fast set-up and quick turnarounds—the finished product has to be delivered before the vehicle can leave the winery dock. Perhaps more important to the mobile wine bottling process, Crawford adds, is the contribution of winery staffers such as Gustafsson.

"How organized and thorough the people are is important to the bottling process," Crawford explains. This is especially true for mobile bottlers because they are working with a number of variables from the individual winery setup to different materials selected by each winemaker.

"You don't call in a bottling line, and they dictate how they want to package the wine for you," Boltin remarks. "It seems to work the other way around. Most wineries do all the footwork themselves—from ordering glass and corks to getting the bottles printed, everything—and then the mobile unit works with what you provide. For me, it's really important to have control over what sort of bottle I'm using, what the package is going to look like, how it feels, all those little elements."

Especially important to Boltin is using sustainable packaging. In its first two years of business, Eight Arms Cellars donated \$5,000 raised through the company's Go Green, Drink Red/White program to help preserve, renew and protect forest and oceans. The Verallia Eco Series bottles used for The Tentacle have a 21 percent reduction of carbon dioxide emissions during manufacturing compared to a traditional wine bottle; use a higher percentage of recycled glass; and have 25 percent smaller overall carbon footprint.

Verallia North America is the first glass container manufacturer to earn the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Partner of the Year Award (2009 and 2010), along with its parent company Saint-Gobain, for its energy management and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The packaging supplier also takes a three-pronged approach to sustainable bottle manufacturing: the glass material, the glass-making process and eco-friendly bottles.

1. Glass material: With on-site cullet processing facilities in Madera and Seattle, the Verallia North America Wine Sector currently uses more than 50 percent cullet (recycled glass) in the production of all its wine bottles and up to 90 percent for green colors in its Port Allegany, PA, plant.

2. Glass-making process: As part of Verallia North America's sustainable initiatives, the wine sector has reduced energy use in the manufacture of wine bottles by nearly 5 percent since 2006 (measured in MBTU/tons of glass); reduced the carbon footprint of wine bottle manufacturing by more than 11,000 tons since 2006—the equivalent of taking 2,000 cars off the road; both the Madera and Seattle plants have achieved more than 1 million hours without a lost-time accident in 2010.

3. Eco-friendly bottles: In 2009, Verallia launched the Eco Series line of bottles that combine aesthetics with eco-friendliness. It's the first glass container series manufactured in North America focusing on eco-conception, a process to maintain high quality and enhance customer appeal while reducing the impact on the environment. Verallia has sold more than 100 million bottles in this series.

Lightweight packs strength

Some early adopters of lightweight wine bottles complained about the bottles being fragile and difficult to fill. According to Bob Parise, vp of sales and marketing for Verallia's Wine Sector, the new Eco Series bottles have been designed to offer the strength of traditional bottles.

"Our Eco Series line is made with the same quality specifications and the same wall thickness specifications as the heavier bottles that they replaced," Parise explains. "So as far as the glass wall thickness, the glass wall integrity or anything of that nature, these bottles are identical to the bottles that they replaced.

"This is where our design group comes in," he adds. "To take weight out of a container and to maintain all the wall thicknesses, it has to come out of somewhere. There are three main areas where weight reduction takes place: It either has to come out of the height a little bit; it has to come out of the punt; or it has to come out of the diameter or the general shape of the bottle."

According to Parise, what sets Eco Series apart is how Verallia overcame these technical challenges with an eye on both design and packaging operations' needs. "The trick is in how to make an attractive bottle that's lighter in weight and that runs on the customer's line," Parise explains. "So in doing all those, putting all those factors together and coming up with a bottle for it and that's what our design guys do."

Spring forward

This spring, Top It Off Bottling packaged 977 12-bottle cases of The Tentacle in green Eco Series bottles. Discussing his experience with the lightweight wine bottles, Crawford says, "Early on, the lightweight bottles tended to be less strong and more prone to breakage. That's not the case now. They've improved the design so breakage is not as big of a problem."

For this bottling, the Eco Series bottles were loaded by conveyor into the 35-ft trailer where Top It Off Bottling houses its packaging operation. The wine, which was blended from 42 percent Napa Valley Syrah, 41 percent Mendocino Syrah, 9 percent Lake County Grenache and 8 percent Alexander Valley Syrah in a stainless-steel tank, is pumped out of the tank into Top It Off Bottling's trailer using a peristaltic pump.

The winery sanitizes the hoses, and Top It Off Bottling steam-sanitizes its mobile bottling equipment. There are three bottling systems in the trailer that was brought to Winterhawk, and the **EuroStar Srl** monobloc filler line was used to bottle The Tentacle.

When a 750 mL bottle enters the monobloc system, it is grasped by the neck and tilted against one of 12 nitrogen sparging heads, which rinses the bottle and removes the oxygen. The rinsed bottle enters a starwheel, where cams lift it up and against one of 16 filling heads. The pressure causes a spring valve on the filling head to open and dispense the wine at a rate of 50 bottles/min.

The sterilized corks- which are manufactured by **Portocork America Inc.** and have the Eight Arms Octopus icon, the Eight Arms Cellars website and the company's phone number printed on them-arrived in sealed bags filled with sulfur dioxide, an antimicrobial agent.

The gas, Crawford says, will sit in the hopper with the sterile corks, thus ensuring the closures' sterilization until **Arol USA Inc.** single-head corker inserts the corks into the filled bottles.

Poly-laminate capsules from **C&E Capsule** are hand-applied by Top It Off Bottling's staff, and a **Bertolaso S.p.A.** spinner fits the capsules over the bottle top and around the glass and cork. Bottles are hand-packed 12 to a case, and then sealed with a **Wexxar/BEL** case taper.

Choosing not to be difficult

"What have I learned from packaging?" Boltin muses. "There are a lot of packaging choices out there but you still want to go with materials that aren't too unusual when it comes to bottle shapes and variables like that." He explains that contract packaging operations, especially mobile bottling lines, may be able to handle special packaging shapes and materials but using very unusual packaging can cost in efficiency or dollars. "It can slow down the rate of bottling or there might be extra service fees," Boltin remarks.

He doesn't want to discourage wine makers from using mobile bottlers, though. "I just bottled my fourth vintage," Boltin adds. "Really, I found it pretty smooth all the way along. People in the wine industry are very helpful."