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**EMBATTLED
FOSTER'S**

Where to next?

**EWEN
MACPHERSON**

Queenslander in the spotlight

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Show stoppers

Cindie Smart

Some wine labels simply refuse to be ignored. Of the 200 wines lined up for tasting at the Third International Shiraz Alliance in June, only a handful fell into this category for me. Three of the best were First Drop Wines 2%, Kaesler Old Bastard Shiraz and Samuel's Gorge Shiraz.

The First Drop 2% is a Barossa Shiraz with a splash of Albarino (2%), which features a seedy looking Spanish man on the front label, printed on what appears at first glance to be slats of timber.

It's two degrees of separation in a packaging sense from First Drop's 100% Albarino called The Matador, which features a Spanish bullfighter on the label.

Co-owner and marketer John Retsas says the idea with the entire First Drop range is to create linkages between the wines to take the consumer on a journey.

"The character on the back label of 2% is a Spanish or Hispanic dude. It's a rip off of our Matador label, which is an Albarino. He's a back ally dude who's not your traditional wine packaging character. We've carried through the Spanish theme or influence from the Matador to the 2%," he said.

"The dude on the front is wearing bling, AKA 50 Cent, or 2% in this case. He's carrying 2% milk, which links to another of our wines, Mother's Milk.

"We've also included a gangsta rap on the back—it's very different for a wine label! The intention with all our brands is that they have their own personality. That was the motivation with 2%—create a unique character, cut the label to reflect bits of timber, and tell a creative story. But not be different for the sake of it, so we've kept some common themes throughout the range."

The blend of Shiraz and Albarino is also quite different. In fact, co-owner and winemaker Matt Gant says he believes the 2% is the only Shiraz Albarino blend in the world. "The 2% splash of Albarino softens

the tannins of the Shiraz. Only 2% makes a huge difference just like adding one or two percent of Viognier to Shiraz," he says.

The First Drop bottles are a lot of fun, but the boys back it up with consistently serious wines that score in the low, mid and high 90s. But John says wine quality alone is no longer enough.

"We've spent a lot of time, effort and

money on our packaging and it's great to see that it's paying off," he said.

The Kaesler Old Bastard Shiraz label features another interesting character (an old bastard), created by well known artist Ralph Steadman.

Kaesler winemaker and general manager Reid Bosward said he was initially sceptical about using a cartoon figure and the words



'Old Bastard' on a wine label, particularly for a \$165 per bottle wine, but the early years of hard work to win respect had paid off.

"My business partner Ed Peter, a banker, desperately wanted to call the wine Fat Bastard, but I explained that had been done. So we went with Old Bastard. Ed also desperately wanted to use Ralph Steadman for the label, so we approached Ralph," Reid said.

"Using the name Old Bastard was against my better judgement, but it's worked. It's doing very well. I'm a bit of a traditionalist and at the time it was a shocking thing to do. It's funny, the label always gets a response—either very positive or very negative. There are never fence sitters with the Old Bastard.

"The label really splits people, but at the end of the day it certainly gets people talking about the wine and picking it up off the shelf."

Reid said the Asian market was particularly receptive to Old Bastard, while the English market was a little more reluctant, given the adventurous name and the traditional nature of the market.

GANGSTA RAP

Two Percent 2006 Barossa Shiraz: Love it or hate it, Barossa Shiraz is on top and I'm gon' shine amigo with my sweet phat fruit. Go 'head and envy me, I'm the BV's MVP and 2% ain't goin' nowhere, so you can get to know me. Check it www.firstdropwines.com.

And who is the Old Bastard? "I say it was based on Ed and he says it was based on me, but he's got more shares so he'll probably win that argument," Reid said.

The Old Bastard isn't the only quirky wine in the Kaesler range, with the Weapon of Mass Seduction, The Bogan and The Fave also raising some eyebrows.

But the Old Bastard is no slouch on the wine quality front. Harvey Steiman named the 2005 OB in his top 25 Benchmark Australian Wines in *Wine Spectator*, then *Wine Enthusiast* featured Old Bastard on its cover late last year, giving the 2005 a

cool 95 points. Robert Parker went on to award the 2005 Old Bastard 98 points in an April '08 issue of *Business Week*. The Americans love it.

"We take our winemaking very seriously. You can only get away with this kind of packaging if your wine is serious," Reid said. "There's a fine line between tacky and quirky. The fact that Ralph Steadman created the label and he's a well known artist who has been behind a lot of labels also adds a layer of credibility."

A perennial packaging favourite around the WBM offices is the beautifully designed Samuel's Gorge Shiraz, developed by winemaker Justin McNamee and Tucker Creative. Tucker's job was to develop a label that would appeal to the US market at a US \$35 price point. Tucker used a tiled mosaic pattern on the label, with each tile containing an image of the wines, winery or winemaker. The overall effect is spectacular and speaks of class, finesse and individuality. The packaging continues to win acclaim for its originality and innovation.

WINE BARREL RACKS

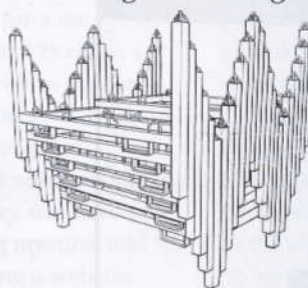
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