Toast the *DAY*

A California wine brand's pouch offers a fresh take on the caregory.

By Linda Casey

The pouch's multi-layer structure helps prevent the package from ruin in an ice cooler, and the pouch also lets consumers chill the wine nearly three times faster than glass bottles do.

With record high wine shipments, the U.S. surpassed France as the world's largest wine-consuming nation two years ago. Wine industry consultant Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates (Woodside,CA) says Americans drank approximately 330 million cases of the red, white, and blush in 2010. Most of this wine was made here in the U.S, some of the vino traveled from foreign soils, and virtually all of it was sold in bottles.

In an industry steeped in traditions, Ryan Donnelly, co-founder of Home Team Wines (Sonoma, CA) aims to expand the ways Americans enjoy wine. Along with Home Team Wines' other founder, Lane Shackleton, and X Winery's (Napa, CA) founder and head winemaker Reed Renaudin, Donnelly launched the Bluebird Wine Pouch.
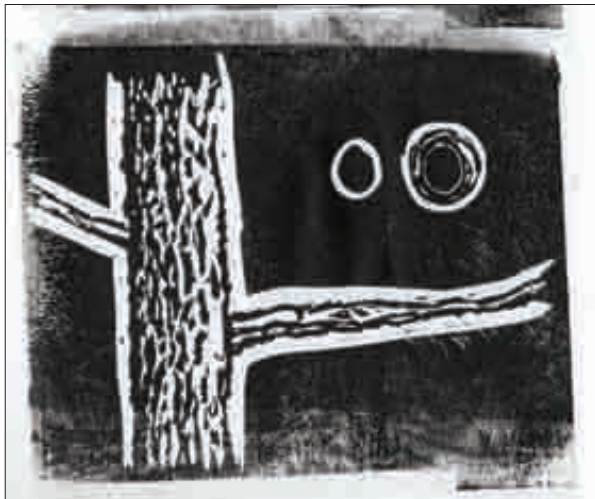
The collaboration's first offering in the standup pouch is a Pinot Noir that the company describes as a full-bodied, spicy, Burgundy-style red. Placing a better quality wine in the standup pouch was important to Donnelly, because he wants to revolutionize where and how good wine is drunk—not replicate the lower-end experiences offered by some bag-in-box wines.

He was looking specifically to make something worthy of drinking on a "bluebird day": an idiom originally used by ski enthusiasts to describe a

Hand-drawn type is integrated tightly with the tree truck graphic in this drawing.

This concept explores the idea of an evening, outdoor setting.

The feel and style of the final type are evident in this sketch. The Bluebird name, though, has less prominence here, and there's less size variation between the three messages.

sunny day after a fresh snowfall. Bluebird's target market—Millennials with active lifestyles—has grown the phrase's meaning to describe any day filled with simple pleasures.

To help reach this market, Donnelly and Shackleton approached CF Napa Brand Design (Napa, CA), an agency with more than 35 years in the wine industry. The agency's owner and creative director, David Shuemann, was attracted by the opportunity to create a design using a newer packaging format for this specific wine-drinking market.

"Millennials have a much different view of wine than other demographics," he says. "They're definitely interested in new wines in different formats. They're much more willing to be experimental."

Natural look for a high-tech package

Shuemann was also excited about the alternative packaging's design possibilities. The particular pouch used by Bluebird is an AstraPouch (Penfield, NY). It's glossy, it's big (holding two bottles' worth of wine), and it has a large, flat front panel.

The stand-up pouch offers a much bigger billboard area than a traditional paper wine label. A designer can decorate the entire front of the package, and the AstraPouch's double-gusseted design makes sure the art isn't distorted by bulges and creases in the front panel.

Multilayer film pouches, such as the AstraPouch, brilliantly display designs by overlaying a transparent film over the printed film. This gives the pouches a bright, glossy appearance. And the pouch printing-and-converting process doesn't require the gripper edges associated with many other package deco-and-manufacturing processes. So designers can have their artwork bleed off edges.

With such a refined canvas, the agency could have easily created a sleek, cosmopolitan look for the wine brand. But that wouldn't have conveyed the natural beauty of the outdoors that Bluebird aims to celebrate. Instead, the design process started with pencil and paper.

All of the preliminary artwork, from type to illustration, was done by hand at CF Napa, which produced a linocut of the design. The primitive, woodcut-printing technique gave the design a rough-hewn appearance to suggest a more natural feel.

Throughout the handcrafted exploration and printing process, all the design work was done in simple black and white. Color wasn't added until

the linocuts were digitized for artwork assembly and cleanup. This enabled the design team to focus on type and layout first and really think through the color choices later.

Instead of using colors traditionally associated with wine packaging, the CF Napa team wanted something as unusual as the packaging structure itself. "We were seeing early trends with light blues in other markets," says Shuemann. "At the time, we hadn't seen this color in wine packaging. It was so different and just really arresting."

Naturally, the color range was also a good fit for reinforcing the brand name. "One of the hardest things for wine consumers to do is to remember the brand they drank just last night," says Shuemann. "So we did everything we could to help them remember the name Bluebird."

Choosing light blues as the primary colors also enabled CF Napa to play with complementary colors, such as the reverse white and bright orange, in the design. The resulting look, says Donnelly, is crisp and clean, and it really stands out on retail shelves.

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Built to woo

The packaging has also helped Bluebird get wider distribution. When Home Team Wines was courting liquor distributors last year, the company found that many distributors had no interest. It was just another small wine company trying to break into the business.

But with the introduction of the wine pouch, the vintner found that some of those same distributors were now eager to talk. "Distributors are actually calling us," says Donnelly. "They [almost] never call someone small like us, but they wanted the pouch."

Unlike traditional wine bottles that need to sit on a shelf, pouches have more merchandising options. Because the pouch is completely covered with a clear laminated film, it can be displayed on ice without damaging the decoration. Its die-cut handle can double as hanging holes if a retailer wants to hang the pouch from a peg. The pouch's dimensions even offer a merchandising opportunity. "This can slot right in a six-pack's place in a convenience store's cooler case," says Shuemann. Beyond these merchandising opportunities, distributors receive an immediate financial benefit from the packaging format: The lightweight pouches cost less to ship. (Packaging represents only 2% of a filled AstraPouch's weight.) Better still, the packages carry a small carbon footprint. Unfilled Astrapouches reduce gas emissions by 85% compared with unfilled standard glass bottles on a per-liter basis. Home Team Wines adds that even after accounting for current recycling rates for glass, the Astrapouch reduces landfill volumes by at least 70% compared with glass bottles.

Because the pouches are so much less prone to breakage than glass bottles, they also require less tertiary packaging. "We're not using as much cardboard and then trucking it across the country," Donnelly says. And each truckload carries more wine because the pouch's shape and durability allows them to be packed more tightly on each pallet.

Tapped for convenience

The Bluebird Wine Pouch can keep wine fresh for up to a month after opening, thanks to a one-way spout that causes the pouch to collapse upon itself as it pours. It's a convenience that fits right into Bluebird's target demographic's active lifestyles. "It's perfect for a weekend camping trip," says Shuemann. Adds Donnelly, "It's easy to store in a cooler, and it can be brought to more places."

Encouraged by the pouch's warm welcome, Donnelly is setting his 2012 sales goals high. "We were a small wine brand with annual sales of 3,500 cases," he says. "This year, I think we'll sell 10,000 cases." **PD**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT

AstraPouch, www.astrapouch-na.com
CF Napa Brand Design, www.cfnapa.com
Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates, www.gfawine.com