



HARPERS DESIGN AWARDS 2023

HARPERS WINE & SPIRIT




**HARPERS DESIGN
AWARDS 2023**

DELIVERING ON DES



FEATURE Harpers Design Awards 2023

Good and great design can only enhance the liquid in the bottle, while communicating much to the consumer. **Andrew Catchpole** reports back from Harpers Design Awards 2023

Design can only do so much in terms of helping create or revitalise success in a brand, but the role it does play is incredibly important. After all, while the goal may be to impress so thoroughly with the liquid within that the delighted consumer comes back and makes that second purchase, the first battle is to encourage them to pick it up and buy first time around. And this is where thoughtful, impactful and clever design can make a huge difference, building messaging about quality, authenticity, back story and even lifestyle aspirations into the standout appeal on the shelf or back bar.

As this year's winners attest, though, good design and packaging is not simply about looking 'cool' or jumping on the latest thematic bandwagon. The more subtle but highly effective redesign of The Wine Society's own-label range couldn't be more different from the boldly striking styling of Fourth Wave's Los Dias Magicos, or the ultra- pared back simplicity of Cherubino's On the Fringe. All, however, hit their brief, generating much discussion and praise from our judging panel, with their individuality rooted in a deep understanding of the principles of good design.

With regard to the entries themselves, this year delivered a host of excellent products, with much to excite, stimulate and commend. One notable trend – which has been developing over the past few years – is that wines have overtaken spirits and are really at the top of their game, delivering some of the most innovative and refreshing designs in the room. However, both categories, along with cider and lower-alcohol alternatives, gave much food for thought, with many superb designs throughout the various ranges on the judging tables.

One aspect that our judges lend ever greater credence to is that of sustainability in all aspects of packaging, whether that be closures and foils (or lack thereof), recycled paper, biodegradable inks, or a reduction in secondary packaging and lightweighting of bottles. And, in many instances, this is linked to the sustainable credentials of the liquid inside, providing yet another cue for a would-be purchaser who is buying into the right thing.

Chairing the judging of our Design Awards is one of the most rewarding and fascinating events in the *Harpers* calendar, not least because for once – from our b2b perspective – it's all about a more holistic picture, rather than simply tasting and pronouncing on the liquid inside. And our judging lived up to that expectation.

A big congratulations, then, to our winners and all who entered this year, for making Harpers Design Awards 2023 of such a high standard. We hope you enjoy the results.

DESIGN AWARDS JUDGES



➤ Rosie Milsom, marketing manager, Cotswolds Distillery



➤ Riaz Syed, consultant & owner, Stonewines



➤ Bailey Chapman-Hearn, senior designer, Butterfly Cannon



➤ Andrew Catchpole, editor, *Harpers Wine & Spirit*



IGN



ROSIE MILSON

MARKETING MANAGER, COTSWOLDS DISTILLERY

What I'm seeing a lot more of is a trend to more colours, more bright shapes, more abstract, and I think that's looking to younger consumers, wanting more information, but also wanting more of an experience. They are more likely to take a brightly coloured bottle of wine to their friends for dinner than something, even if a lovely Châteauneuf-du-Pape, with an old-style label on it. So in terms of design, we're seeing a lot of wine get a more modern touch, and also seeing a lot more wine in what I'd say traditionally is a spirits bottle, with a screwcap, which I think is really interesting. And again, it ties into that 'how can we be different, how can we switch it up a bit?'. In wine, we're seeing a lot of innovation now around bottle type, as opposed to just labels, and that's really exciting.

With spirits, it's been really consistent, bar a couple of bad examples. There also seems to be a shift to sustainability, a lack of secondary packaging, which is great. Some still have it and I question that – is it necessary? On a £60 bottle, probably not.

Packaging is probably the most important thing initially. If you don't have a really big brand following and don't have loads of money to spend on marketing the thing that's going to get someone to pick up your bottle and look at it for the two seconds before they make a decision is going to be the design. So that's really key – consumers will always shop with their eyes to a certain extent. And that's why we're seeing a lot more attention to detail. Producers need to make sure they have that presence on shelf.



BEST NEW WINE, BEST PRODUCT RANGE AND SUPREME CHAMPION

SECOND GLANCE

Brand owner: Treasury Premium Brands

Designer: Denomination

This range comprising pet nat, 'chillable Grenache' and amber wines, is right on trend and the "classy" design doesn't let it down. "Immediately striking, appealing colour schemes, with key info in all the right places", this had, according to our designer judges, "everything in place". The range was also highlighted for being "clever and humorous", while thought an excellent response to consumer insights driving the brief. Moreover, in addition to being "so original and unique, tells the story elegantly", it was noted that "sustainability is shown rather than thrust upon us". Simply put, "everything spot on".

“There seems to be a shift to sustainability, a lack of secondary packaging, which is great”

Rosie Milsom



BEST REDESIGN

THE WINE SOCIETY OWN-LABEL RANGE

Brand owner: The Wine Society

Designer: Barlow & Co

Described glowingly as a “tick-box exercise, having hit every element of their brief”, this subtle makeover nonetheless managed to fully update and modernise the feel of this own-label range, while retaining appeal for those familiar and comfortable with the older style before. The re-tweaked look retains a strong visual identity, carrying the reassurance of The Wine Society brand, but with the addition of subtle imagery – such as old vines from California, a fish for the Riesling – which helps convey much about the wine within. “Really nice cohesion of imagery for the range, each image is unique, but each belongs,” is how one summed up this appealing redesign. “Excellent work,” proclaimed another judge, and clearly all agreed.



BEST ESTABLISHED PRODUCT

TRØVE BOTANICAL SPIRITS

Brand owner: Distil

Designer: Butterfly Cannon

With Green Apple, Raspberry and Orange variants presented, the Trøve rage was a big hit, having the judges warming to its playful, uplifting design. “I like the colour palette, its lighter lines feel happy, convey the summer, perhaps summer fruits and positivity,” said one, summing up the overall impression. The finishes were also considered “very well done – Bravo!”, with the range “super-cohesive, with great use of colour and materials”. There was also added excitement for the brand’s environmental strategy, which included the use of recycled paper, tying all together in a very appealing package indeed.



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Harpers Design Awards 2023



BEST INDIVIDUAL PRODUCT – SPIRITS

POD PEA VODKA

Brand owner: Ten Locks

Designer: Kingsland Drinks

A lovely looking and also very original design, making the most of this vodka's unusual but fresh-as-garden distillate, namely the humble pea. "Very clean and contemporary, but also feels honest and authentic; gorgeous bottle/label combo," was one reaction, with another liking its "fun, quirky and honest" appeal, which "really captured the pea". Pod Pea vodka was additionally noted for having "great credentials on sustainability", which tied seamlessly with the overall green scheme of the design. A true original, done very well.



"Where people are showing innovation, it's really good to see they are pushing the boundaries"

Riaz Syed



BEST NEW CIDER

INCOGNITO CIDER

Brand owner: Yallingup Cider Co

Designer: Denomination

"I Love the cute ninja! It's super eye-catching, clean and intriguing, and meets the brief – just a lovely design," was one burst of enthusiasm for this superior-looking cider. "This absolutely works, it suggests modernity and freshness," added another judge, noting the "impactful and bold design". One judge went so far as to say, "as a non-cider person, I want to try this", which, coming from a designer, is high praise indeed, summing up the compelling nature of the packaging.



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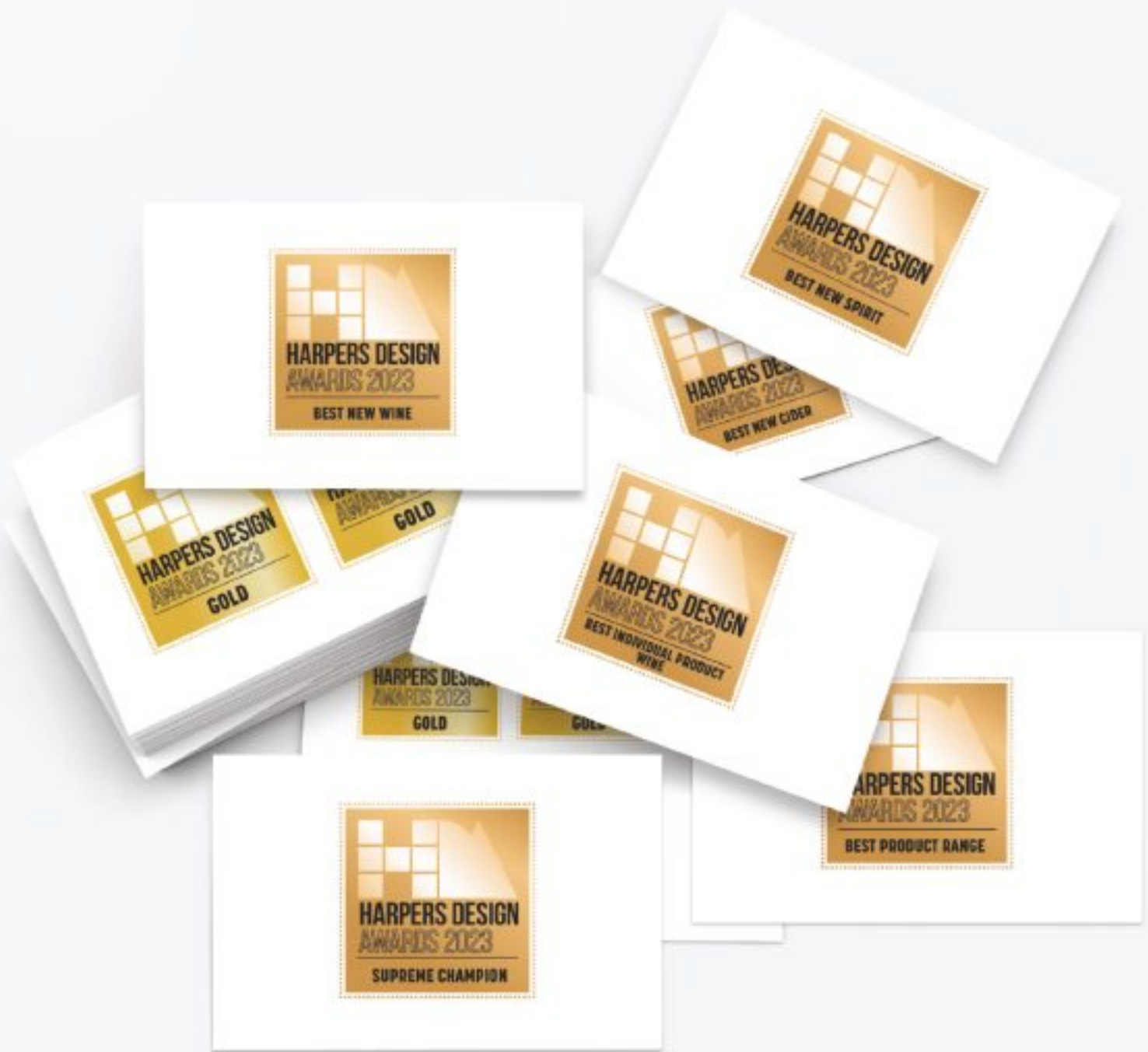
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Our cup runneth over.



denomination

Design Agency of the Year 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022 - and now again.





RIAZ SYED

▸ **CONSULTANT & OWNER,
STONEWINES**

At the top end the quality was really good, more innovation than we've seen in recent years. Particularly impressive was seeing the English producers really come to the fore. In the past, we've seen them go for French-style labelling or really insipid, bland labels, but this time we've seen them really go for it.

We're still seeing a lot of very average, middle-of-the road designs, but where people are showing innovation, it's really good to see they are pushing the boundaries. Australia, once again, is really showing and doing well, but it always does. Particularly when promoting a style, like the sparkling wine that just had three grapes on the label, which is really clever, because to the people who know, it's the classic combination, but it also conveys something to those who don't. It's a third way.

Some of the more innovative design may turn off more traditional buyers, but then many of them wouldn't be going for those more modern styles of wine anyway. As such, we should applaud the efforts people are making in going for something different. An example is a Spanish wine I sold which adopted exactly the same philosophy. It was a red wine in clear glass. It looked great, it was really effective and it sold really well because people were drawn towards it on the shelf.

As for what stood out, weirdly, the bottle with nothing on it really stood out. And environmental, sustainable considerations also informed our scoring, so it's been good to see progress being made there as well.

"We're seeing a lot of wine get a more modern touch, and also a lot more wine in what I'd say traditionally is a spirits bottle"

Rosie Milsom



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BEST INDIVIDUAL PRODUCT
– WINE

ON THE FRINGE

Brand owner: Cherubino

Designer: Denomination

Described as "interesting, innovative design, love the use of white space", this pared-back but highly effective presentation "tells the beginning of an intriguing story". It is "simple but effective", the whole suggesting "purity", with the hand-written graphics noted for lending an additional air of "bespoke quality and authenticity". All in all, a stunning design, perhaps best described by one as "for those in the know, it really works", and yet while also holding a broad appeal.



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BAILEY CHAPMAN-HEARN ▶ SENIOR DESIGNER, BUTTERFLY CANNON

I think many of the spirits offerings in here feel normal and standard. I've seen a lot of whiskies, of gins, of other spirits in their categories that look like the ones we're looking at, so they haven't really stuck in my mind as much as some of the wines. Looking at the wines, I'm a lot more engaged, and while the category has its set design codes, there are a lot of examples here that completely do their own thing and I really like some of those. They make you pick them up and ask 'what's the story, what are they doing, what are they like?' – for me that's much more interesting. Those are the ones that I'm going to leave this room thinking about.

Independent wineries are really good, because they can just do what they want, create a brand and a label that young people, Gen Zs and Millennials, will pick up just because it looks cool. And there are lots of examples of producers doing that. That's definitely moving in the right direction. Others have tried, but you feel sometimes they haven't been brave enough. So the designs I've been most taken with are those looking to appeal to younger consumers, they seem to be moving in a new direction. Design is the first point where consumers will see anything – craft beer is a great example, because they really have to stand out in their category. They tend to be colourful, vibrant, crazy and distinctive, and it's no different with anything else. The wine category is more and more saturated, so it's really interesting if they are looking to craft beers for inspiration, for something to catch your eye.



BEST NEW SPIRIT

LOS DIAS MAGICOS

Brand owner: Fourth Wave

Designer: Denomination

"Striking images" that are "really impactful" announced a "really nice range, cohesive but with good differentiation", being at once "innovative, yet solid". The "bold and characterful" label "captures the story of the brand perfectly", said one judge, to the point where the "unnerving nature will draw in consumers" who are happy to go off-piste and explore something a little different and new. A strong and confident statement from both the brand and its designers, who clearly hit the brief with this striking bottle.



DESIGN AGENCY OF THE YEAR

DENOMINATION

With the lion's share of our top awards again this year, Rowena Curlewis and team at Denomination clearly remain on top form, delivering much to interest, excite and please the eye. This agency of the year accolade, though, is not simply about pleasing-looking design, but is closely allied to how well a given brief was met, with the final results pored over in detail by our judges, combining trade acumen and designer eyes. From the "elegant originality" of Second Glance to the "striking innovation" enfolding Los Dias Magicos, by way of the pared-back "purity" of the On the Fringe label, the hand of Denomination delivered originality, always with a fresh and engaging touch. The upshot is an exemplary example of how great design can and does lift a given product above the crowd, while communicating much about the liquid in the bottle, all helped along by reference to the stories lying behind. Congratulations, then, to Denomination, our Design Agency of the Year 2023.

THANKS TO PANEL & ENTRANTS

Harpers would like to thank our judges, for their dedicated and professional input, and all who submitted products for our judging panel this year, making for an exciting and hard-fought competition, with the calibre of entries high. For more information on Harpers Design Awards 2024, or to enter, please contact stuart.sadler@agilemedia.co.uk

MEDAL WINNERS

PRODUCT NAME	BRAND OWNER	DESIGN AGENCY
GOLD		
19 CRIMES	TREASURY PREMIUM BRANDS	DENOMINATION
CLOS DU VAL BERNARD'S CUVÉE	CLOS DU VAL	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
CRATE	FOURTH WAVE	DENOMINATION
CHILL BILL	DE BORTOLI WINES	DE BORTOLI WINES
DUNLEAVY ROSÉ	DUNLEAVY VINEYARDS	JODIE NEWMAN DESIGN
GALLUS	BAROSSA DISTILLING CO	DENOMINATION
GREASY FINGERS	PERNOD RICARD WINEMAKERS	DENOMINATION
INCOGNITO CIDER	YALLINGUP CIDER CO	DENOMINATION
KINGS OF PROHIBITION	CALABRIA FAMILY WINE GROUP	CALABRIA FAMILY WINE GROUP
LA LA LAND PROSECCO	CALABRIA FAMILY WINE GROUP	CALABRIA FAMILY WINE GROUP
LOS DIAS MAGICOS	FOURTH WAVE	DENOMINATION
AUCHENTOSHAN 32	HALCYON SPIRITS	FORTYTWO STUDIO
ON THE FRINGE	CHERUBINO	DENOMINATION
PENFOLDS YATTARNA V	PENFOLDS	DENOMINATION
POD PEA VODKA	TEN LOCKS	KINGSLAND DRINKS
RIVERLIFE BY OXFORD LANDING	HILL-SMITH FAMILY ESTATES	PARALLAX
SAVVY PAIR	SAVVY PAIR	HILL & SKY
SECOND GLANCE	TREASURY PREMIUM BRANDS	DENOMINATION
SEVEN GIANTS	SPIRITS OF VIRTUE	SPIRITS OF VIRTUE
STAGS LEAP DISTRICT WINEGROWERS	STAGS LEAP DISTRICT WINEGROWERS ASSOCIATION	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
TERRA ORGANICA	WATERMILL WINES	STUDIO PARR
THE COPPER CREW	CANNED WINE CO	KIT STUDIO AND TORY MABEY
THE CREW	AUBERT & MATHIEU	AUBERT & MATHIEU
TRØVE BOTANICAL SPIRITS	DISTIL PLC	BUTTERFLY CANNON
WINE SOCIETY OWN LABEL RANGE	THE WINE SOCIETY	BARLOW & CO
SILVER		
ARTESANO DE ARGENTO ORGANIC FAIRTRADE MALBEC ROSE	BODEGA ARGENTO	BODEGA ARGENTO
BANDED BY NEVER NEVER	NEVER NEVER DISTILLING CO	MOLASSES
BLOODY MONDAYS	BLOODY MONDAY BEVERAGES	MOLASSES
BOATMAN'S DRIFT CHENIN BLANC	ELLIS WINES	ELLIS WINES (MARIA BLACKSTONE)
BOMBAY SAPPHIRE ARTISTS EDITION SERIES	BACARDI	KNOCKOUT DESIGN & INNOVATION
BOMBAY SAPPHIRE BASQUIAT	BACARDI	KNOCKOUT DESIGN & INNOVATION
BOMBAY SAPPHIRE PREMIER CRU TUSCAN JUNIPER	BACARDI	KNOCKOUT DESIGN & INNOVATION



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MEDAL WINNERS

PRODUCT NAME	BRAND OWNER	DESIGN AGENCY
BREEZER	BACARDI	KNOCKOUT DESIGN & INNOVATION
CHOSEN BY MAJESTIC	MAJESTIC WINE	PARR STUDIOS
CROITHLI DARACH RANGE	CROITHLI DISTILLERY	THREEBRAND
DADA CHAPEL – POTATO VODKA AND BHRUM	DADA CHAPEL DISTILLERY	STRANGER & STRANGER
DE BORTOLI WINES 'RE-WRITE THE RULES'	DE BORTOLI WINES	DE BORTOLI WINES
DIRTGRAIN WHISKY	BLACKWATER DISTILLERY	THREEBRAND
DOUGLAS LAING'S BIG PEAT – THE SMOKEHOUSE EDITION	DOUGLAS LAING & CO	DOUGLAS LAING & CO (CLAIRE COETZEE)
DUBLIN LIBERTIES KING OF HELL	QUINTESSENTIAL BRANDS GROUP	BELLAGIADA
FIADH RUADH	FIADH RUADH	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
FUZZY BARE PIQUETTE	FOURTH WAVE	DENOMINATION
GMT +9	WEST COAST BREWING	THREEBRAND
GODAWAN ARTISANAL INDIAN SINGLE MALT	DIAGEO INDIA	BUTTERFLY CANNON
GOOD TROUBLE	GOOD TROUBLE BOURBON	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
HAVANA CLUB 7 X PLACES+FACES	HAVANA CLUB INTERNATIONAL	PRINCIPE ACTIF
HUNDRED KNOTS KHOAI WINE	RD WINERY	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
JOHNNIE WALKER BLUE LABEL, CITIES OF THE FUTURE 2220	DIAGEO	BUTTERFLY CANNON
KINGS HILL	THE PENTLAND STILL	HUNT HANSON
MOJT COCKTAILS	SHANGHAI LONG TENG SHENG SHI LIQUOR CO	BUTTERFLY CANNON
NIKA TIKI	LANCHESTER WINES	GARAGE CREATIVE
OJO ROJO	ELLIS WINES	MARIA BLACKSTONE, IN HOUSE DESIGNER
PATRÓN EL CIELO	PATRÓN TEQUILA	THREEBRAND
PIERLOT BY SEPPELT	TREASURY PREMIUM BRANDS	DENOMINATION
PINCHGUT RUM	FOURTH WAVE	DENOMINATION
PUNTO ALTO	ELLIS WINES	ELLIS WINES (MARIA BLACKSTONE)
REAL SPARKLING TEAS	REAL DRINKS CO	BUTTERFLY CANNON
ROOSTER ROJO MEZCAL	AMBER BEVERAGE GROUP	POND DESIGN
SAMPHIRE	MCWILLIAM'S WINES	MCWILLIAM'S WINES

MEDAL WINNERS

PRODUCT NAME	BRAND OWNER	DESIGN AGENCY
SILK & SPICE SPICE ROAD	SOGRAPE VINHOS	VOLTA DESIGN STUDIO/ AUSTON DESIGN GROUP
SPOKE	VINEYARD PRODUCTIONS	AMPHORA
STOLI VODKA X JASON NAYLOR	STOLI GROUP	BUTTERFLY CANNON
TEMPUS TWO – LIGHTEN UP	AUSTRALIAN VINTAGE	MOLASSES
TESCO FINEST WINE	TESCO	BARLOW & CO
THE GLENLIVET ORIGINAL STORIES – A LIMITED EDITION SERIES	PERNOD RICARD	JDO
THE GRAPPLER	VINOCE VINEYARDS	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
THE IMPRESSIONIST SHIRAZ	ELLIS WINES	ELLIS WINES (MARIA BLACKSTONE)
TOAST & HONEY	MAJESTIC WINE	GRAPHIC BRANDS
TREVISANA BIO	RINOMATA CANTINA TOMBACCO, VIA LANCHESTER WINES IN THE UK	RADERWERK BRAND DESIGN
UNORTHODOX WINES	DGB	BRANDEVER
BRONZE		
ASTRAEA GIN	ASTRAEA SPIRITS	STRANGER & STRANGER
BÉLENA	CALABRIA FAMILY WINE GROUP	CALABRIA FAMILY WINE GROUP
BELVEDERE 10	LVMH	STRANGER & STRANGER
COMPASS BOX DELOS	COMPASS BOX	STRANGER & STRANGER
'TI AMO' FIANO	DE BORTOLI WINES	DE BORTOLI WINES
DOUGLAS LAING'S TIMOROUS BEASTIE PORT EDITION - THE CHEESE CELLAR COLLECTION	DOUGLAS LAING & CO	DOUGLAS LAING & CO (CLAIRE COETZEE)
FÈIS ÎLE RANGE BUNNAHABHAIN	BUNNAHABHAIN	THREEBRAND
GODAWAN 100 SERIES – A RARE WHISKY TO SAVE A RARE SPECIES	DIAGEO INDIA	BUTTERFLY CANNON
JING HEALTHCARE NO.1	JING BRAND CO	JDO
LAGG	ISLE OF ARRAN DISTILLERS LIMITED	STRANGER & STRANGER
LÁGRIMAS DEL VALLE TEQUILA	ALTAMAR BRANDS	WATERMARK DESIGN
LUTÈCE APÉRITIF	MAISON FONTAINE	STRANGER & STRANGER
MIX UP	KINGSLAND DRINKS	KINGSLAND DRINKS
OLDE RALEIGH DISTILLERY	OLDE RALEIGH DISTILLERY	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
OPHELIA WINE	TREASURY WINE ESTATE	STRANGER & STRANGER
PATRÓN EL ALTO	PATRÓN TEQUILA	THREEBRAND
POWERS IRISH WHISKY	IRISH DISTILLERS (PERNOD RICARD)	STRANGER & STRANGER
PURATO	THE WINE PEOPLE SRL	ADVISION SRL
REBROOK CELLARS	REBROOK CELLARS	CF NAPA BRAND DESIGN
THE GLENLIVET TWIST & MIX COCKTAILS	PERNOD RICARD	JDO



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SHELF APPEAL

Jo Gilbert goes back to basics with the big four design agencies to find out what has changed in recent years and what it takes for wines and spirits to win today's shelf wars

The dial has moved a long way from where it was 10 years ago when it comes to what constitutes 'good design'. With so much competition on shelf – where wine brands are increasingly having to jostle for attention against spirits and beers, rather than their immediate wine rivals – the burden of creating a bottle which tickles eye-candy receptors, as well as ticking sustainability boxes, is adding an extra layer of complexity for designers.

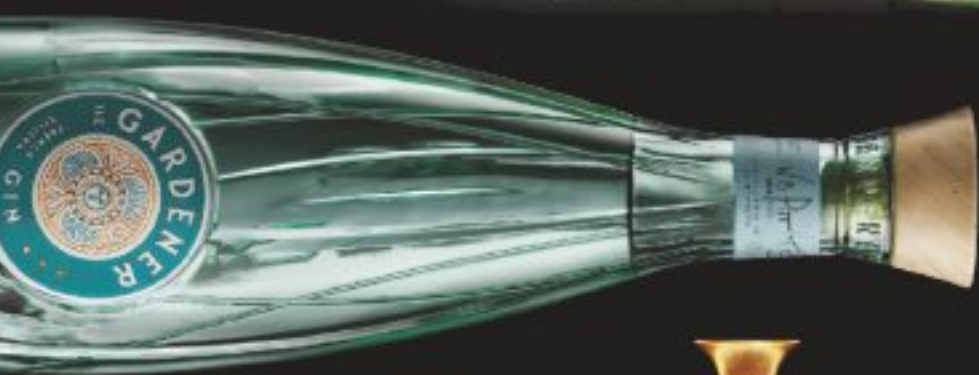
But with complexity and challenges comes interest and innovation. That is certainly what came leaping out of our Harpers Design Awards 2023 (p24), where the quality of the products on show was a testament to just how important good design is to a brand's overall success, where not only sales, but repeat sales, are key to longevity.

The past decade has been marked by alt format innovation and sustainable advancements catering to an increasingly sophisticated consumer base.





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“The vast majority of consumers want to make a quick decision and confusing them or bombarding them might make the difference in sales”

Neil Tulley MW, Amphora Design

FEATURE
Design

Some things however, of course remain the same. Good design starts with a good brief or a good relationship. To get there, designers will often ask an uncomfortable number of questions in order to get to the heart of a brand or hold a mirror to its core values.

“When commissioning design, people think we’re going to impose an idea on them, but believe it or not, it has to come from within,” Neil Tulley MW, founder & creative director, Amphora Design, tells *Harpers*.

“That window back up stream to the producer must be as clear as possible. We’re holding up a mirror... and the interesting thing is that this mirror also ends up evolving [the producer’s] thinking as the project evolves.”



EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Good design also elicits an emotional response from its target audience. As Garry Calderwood, creative director at Love, points out: “We’ve found time and again that when products lack that emotional connection, they ultimately risk indifference and even delisting.

“The design might telegraph flavour appeal, it might look beautiful, it might make them smile, or it might resonate on a cultural level, but ultimately the design triggers an emotional response.

“With Brewdog’s Lone Wolf gin for example, the product was in danger of being delisted due to the recessive nature of the existing design, despite it being a hit with the design community. We needed to tap into the attitude and cult following of the parent brand and in the end, our design outsold the other 4:1, despite being more expensive.”

While many core pillars remain the same, recent advances in tech have also given designers a bigger and better palette to work with. Now, it’s possible to create something where the functionality or practical reality of hitting a sustainable brief doesn’t have to compromise the overall aesthetic.

“It’s evolved so much over the past 20 years,” says Tulley. “Premium paper stock and print finishes weren’t doable or affordable to everyone before. But now, better print tech means beautiful labels to redress the imbalance created by other things – lighter glass bottles, for example.”

Also crucial to the success of brands is how they draw eyeballs in today’s increasingly busy shelf environment.

Often, design briefs start with ‘standing out’ as an objective. For Tulley’s design of Côte du Rhône brand Les Dauphins – “a ridiculously visual brand” – the end product perfectly fit the brief to “sit comfortably



within the Rhône category, but stand out at the same time”.

Sometimes however, the only way to stand out when everyone is talking loudly, is to quieten right down, as in the case of Definition – Majestic’s first own-label brand.

“It’s also important to have a hierarchy of information: primary, secondary and tertiary,” Tulley says. “Otherwise, it’s like lots of people talking in the same room at the same time. There is an argument for something being in another language, or if something is not understood, that can be part of the mystery. But for the vast majority of consumers, they want to make a quick decision and confusing them or bombarding them might make the difference in sales.”

“In store, we’re always asking, why do consumers’ eyes stop: is the product familiar or is it a differentiator?” adds Rowena Curlewis, founding partner and CEO at Denomination, who recently worked on Pernod Ricard’s ‘fast-food pairing wine’, Greasy Fingers. “If it’s a differentiator, it doesn’t mean the product has to scream. Sometimes a quiet design gives it that distinctiveness. We have to be really cognisant of retail strategy on shelf. You’ve got to know what you’re up against and who your competition is going to be.”

↑ THE AMPHORA
DESIGN TEAM AT
WORK



Meanwhile, Kevin Shaw, founder of Stranger & Stranger, identifies the four pillars of any successful pack as: story, stand-out appeal, quality and timing (more on 'timing' in box, right).

When it comes to storytelling, he says, "spirits walk all over wines", continuing: "Most wines tell exactly the same story – something about family-owned winemakers seeking to make the best expression of their terroir... 'winespeak', essentially. On the other hand, we've had briefs for vodka distilled from clouds, spirits made from discarded supermarket fruit, bourbon flavoured with bacon and a gin made like a tequila. We designed Aberfeldy based on the fact that the distillery water contains traces of real gold – a great liquid story. Once you have a great story, the pack designs itself."



TAKING RISKS

Bespoke wine bottles are sadly a rarity in the design world. But conventionality, and making sure the consumer isn't going to be embarrassed by their choice, is patently still of major importance in wine.

As Tulley says: "BiB is a great canvas to place a design on. But there is something in the reassurance of the glass bottle that allows designers to take bigger risks, as a wine bottle says 'this is reliable and a good product'. We're still in a very conservative category, so we're always treading that fine line."

Curlewis adds: "It's about knowing which rules to break and which to keep. Wine is social currency, so a consumer is putting themselves on the line when they take a bottle to friends and family."

Wines and spirits still clearly sit on either side of the drinks aisle when it comes to packaging styles and picking up on consumer cues. But it is also clear that good design can make or break a brand in much the same way, with trends often to be found at the intersection of technological advancements and buying habits.

With sustainability, for example, its influence on the evolution of 'luxury' is clear across wines and spirits. Maybe this is best illustrated by Ruinart's second skin casing, which is nine times lighter than its predecessor. In 2020, the Champagne house committed to substitute all single boxes with this recyclable casing, which is made from 99% paper and is moulded to the shape of the bottle.

"Gifting used to be essentially the more the merrier – fancy closures, layered design elements, foils/embossing/trinkets. Ruinart second skin paved a new way for us to think about luxury, while the quiet, stealth luxury of TV's *Succession* is influencing how we think about luxe these days," Curlewis concludes. ■

"It's about knowing which rules to break and which to keep"

Rowena Curlewis, Denomination

ELEVATOR PITCH

Leading wine and spirits designers pitch in with their thoughts on what makes great design tick



**KEVIN SHAW,
FOUNDER, STRANGER
& STRANGER**

Timing. We created and launched the first paper wine bottle, Paperboy, 10 years ago with Safeway in the US, but sustainability wasn't a big enough issue back then. Fast-forward and the past year has seen

a whole mixed casefull of paper bottle launches, so hopefully something will stick this time around. Timing is everything.



**ROWENA CURLEWIS,
FOUNDING
PARTNER AND CEO,
DENOMINATION**

Relationships. Building a long-term relationship with your agency partner is key. I have clients that I've worked with closely for five to 10 years, a couple of them 20 years. We can

shortcut to a great idea/concept/proposition/opportunity quickly because we understand intimately how each other thinks and works.



**GARRY CALDERWOOD,
CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
LOVE**

Sustainability and shareability. We simply cannot keep creating products, no matter how beautiful, without considering the environmental impact, particularly as

a B Corp-certified agency. Meanwhile, shareability is a key metric as it gives us very different results from things such as eye-tracking or asking 'which design is the most premium looking'. If someone is willing to be seen in their social feed with a product, it's a big deal, and has become a really useful parameter to measure how good a design is.



**NEIL TULLEY MW,
FOUNDER & CREATIVE
DIRECTOR, AMPHORA
DESIGN**

Psychology. We've found we can tailor design concepts to certain states of need, but it's important to consider that consumers' minds will be framed before they enter

the store. Look at what motivates them to pick up something off shelf: are they shopping in the wine category or outside? Then there is the influence of colour, seasonal cues, taste, price and where it's being sold. The sweet spot is where these things meet.

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