

imbibe

STYLE

SKINDEEP

Sure, it's what's inside that counts, but eye-catching labels sell wine too



In contrast to the overtly quirky labels that are popping off shelves these days, New York City-based designer and photographer Friederike Paetzold's dramatic labels have a striking elegance and subtle formality. We caught up with her recently to talk about her classic designs.

Imbibe: As an exhibiting artist, how did you come to focus on wine-label design?

Paetzold: I grew up drinking wine as a kid—my father is European, so there was always a bottle at the dinner table. He believed he was “tasting history” through wine. So the juice had a bit of a mystical quality for me. In the mid-'90s, John Hunt, the founder of Oriel Wines, saw some of my Web-based art pieces. He asked me to design the brand image of his new Australian shiraz. The creative freedom I had, and the cultural references to play with in the name, Songlines, were exciting.

Imbibe: What part of label and product design is most interesting to you?

Paetzold: I love seeing how far I can push the age-old vocabulary of the wine label—the typography, the shape, the foil-stamping—without losing its historical references. Some of my favorite labels are the ultra-traditional Bordeaux or Riojas, with their multiple typefaces that go against everything I worship about clean white space. I love them because they evoke a sense of history and craftsmanship that predates hyper-marketing.

Imbibe: What are the unique challenges of wine-label design?

Paetzold: There is a forest of legal requirements about where certain information goes (like alcohol content, volume and warning labels), exact type size and the precise language that's used. And some wine-producing regions will reject a label if it's too unconventional.

Imbibe: What are you inspired by right now?

Paetzold: Art, travel, music and film—for me, these and wine are life's pleasures, and they enhance each other perfectly. I'm a typography nut, so the recent dada show at the Museum of Modern Art conjured visions of a label with wittily cut-up wood-block type. Or a label inspired by cubist still-lives with old French newspaper textures. And I dream of designing a whiskey brand inspired by bar scenes in noir films.

To see more of Paetzold's work, visit vinimenta.com.

