

**The Australian Wine Label, an analysis of the impact of
graphic design and visual communication strategies
in the wine industry.**

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other institution or university.

(signed)

Acknowledgements

The journey from the first conceptual idea to the completion of a research higher degree thesis is, in hindsight, a journey like no other, and without quality supervision that incorporates patience, perseverance, guidance and encouragement, that journey might never end. That my journey has come this far is testament to the quality of support and the patient, even tolerant supervision I have had the privilege to encounter. I am grateful to Michael Ostwald who, as a supervisor, has been both generous and collegiate, smoothing the ripples and providing a coherent and logical pathway to completion that gave both encouragement and confidence when it was needed. From Geoff Caban I have learned about the necessity of grasping and holding a diligent focus and writing practice, with an ability to review, write and rewrite until the final shape is both scholarly and enjoyably informative; I remain indebted to his patience and ever thankful for his support.

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Declaration

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

To enable a better understanding of the relationship between visual communication design or graphic design strategies and the creation of brand identity, embodied in the wine label/package, for Australian Table wines the researcher has created a critical taxonomy of the wine label/package form. The catalyst for the research is the observation that the wine industry is making a considerable investment in the design of labelling and packaging. In response to this situation, this research tests the hypothesis that, the design of wine labelling and packaging plays a significant role in the communication of complex and diverse information about brand values and customer attitudes. As part of the process of testing this hypothesis the research sets out to answer three related questions. The first, what are the dominant elements used in the graphic design of labelling and packaging for the wine industry? The second, what key design strategies are used to develop brand identity? Finally, how have these strategies changed over time?

In order to investigate these three questions, the study constructs a critical taxonomy of wine labels/packages, that is then the subject of a semiotic analysis. This analysis makes reference to representational theory, including the recognition and use of a visual language that manifests in the 'conversation', a concept borrowed from second order cybernetics, between the label/package and the consumer. The research is also informed by the professional knowledge and expertise of the author as 'participant observer' a methodology of practitioner-led research or as (Sullivan 2004, 84) refers to it as *Practice-based research* that is utilised in the study and is justified by the author's experiences as graphic designer and design academic for a period of more than 25 years.

The study and the critical taxonomy is focussed broadly on Australian wine regions and on the Hunter Valley region in particular. The labels that form the major visual element of the taxonomic investigation, span a period in Australian wine history from the late 1940s to 2008.

The research is structured in three parts; the present dissertation, an interactive database recording the process (eBook, DVD) featuring a selection from a collected 7000 classified wine labels and detailing the research journey, and a public exhibition (itself an example of graphic design) of significant elements of the collection and the key findings of the work.

Allan Morse

‘ ...the Australian graphic arts industry has made giant strides overall in the country's comparatively short history, during which it has developed world-competitive products, using sophisticated equipment and— above all— highly innovative design and technological talent, arguably quite out of proportion to the size of its market and the size of its industry.’

...Mendelson

Mendelson Henry, *Where Wine is King*, Labels & Labelling, World of Labels and narrow web, Taurus Publishing, Asia-Pacific March 2002, 4 -15

A Note On Authorship

The author of this dissertation has, for more than 25 years, been a senior academic in the graphic design field and he has also been an active designer in commercial practice. Not only does he have personal experience designing labels for Australian table wines, but also he has extensive experience being briefed by vignerons about the value of graphic design to the wine industry. As part of this process, and during the almost seven years part-time he has been involved in this research, he has become a ‘participant-observer’; a role acknowledged in practice-led research as being a valuable means of investigating a complex process (Sullivan 2004). Finally, because he has taken on this role, parts of the dissertation are written in first person prose; as both a reminder to the reader of the author’s role in the industry, and as a means of acknowledging the practice-based nature of the work.

