

## HUON HOOKE WINE

# Fabled labels

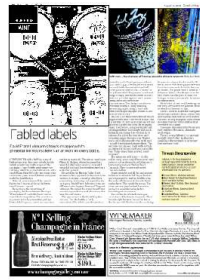
David Franz Lehmann's hands-on approach to presentation means there's an artwork on every bottle.

CONFRONTED with a baffling array of bottles in a grog shop, most people decide which wine to buy on the appeal of the packaging. Fancy bottle; good name; eye-catching label. It's a crowded market – who could blame them? It's why the bigger wine companies spend a small fortune every year updating label design.

After all, your wine could be a world-

beater but if no one picks up the bottle, it will remain a secret.

Recognising the importance of packaging, the Association of Boutique Winemakers of Australia has an annual wine labels competition. This year it was expanded to include the entire package: bottle, label, capsule, carton and any other



marketing materials. The winner was Logan Wines of Mudgee, whose top range has a beautiful label which depicts a vine with colourful fruit and leaves embroidered on a white background.

On a visit to the Barossa Valley I met someone whose approach to the entire wine business is unique – covering viticulture, winemaking, marketing and especially the packaging. David Franz Lehmann is the son of Barossa wine legends Peter and Margaret Lehmann. He named his brand David Franz to avoid any confusion with the winery that bears his dad's name.

The appearance is the first thing that hits you. Yes, the bottle is fairly conventional but that's just about where normality ends. David produces at least 1200 cases (14,400 bottles) of wine a year and each bottle has an individual silk-screen printed label. In fact, it's more a story than a label. The printed words and design occupy most of the bottle surface. Each one provides a good read if you are dining alone and need some entertainment. The designs are also by Lehmann, who has a long-standing interest in graphic design. And each bottle is wrapped in paper, which is also printed with a story.

The ink is not baked on with heat, which happens with most wine-bottle images. But it is durable: it's not easily scratched off and gains extra protection from the wrapping paper. The process, using a computer and printing machine, is so simple and quick, Lehmann can change the wording in 30 minutes. He prints his own boxes and wrapping papers the same way. There's even a mini silk screen for the bottle neck – usually the vintage date goes there. The corks are wax-dipped. Each bottle is truly an artwork in its own right and carries the line: "hand-made, hand-printed, hand-wrapped".

The wines are sold direct – via the online shop ([www.david-franz.com](http://www.david-franz.com)), mail order, or cellar-door sales at Lehmann's home and winery on Stelzer Road, Tanunda. There is one retail outlet: Tanunda Cellars.

Sceptics might read all this and assume Lehmann is some kind of hippie, basket-weaving eccentric, making terrible wine

that only sells because of its rustic hand-made charm. They would be wrong. The wines are very good indeed. Lehmann worked in several wineries before branching out on his own.

He's a viticulturalist who manages 30 hectares of his family vineyards. These include eight hectares around his house that he and wife Nicole own; the rest being

his parents' vineyards, also nearby. He has access to whichever grapes he wants from these vineyards. In 2008, that was 46 tonnes. The grapes were crushed at Peter Lehmann Wines, which is just over the back fence. And the juice or must was brought to his own winery for fermentation and maturation.

David likes his reds with bottle-age and the 2003s are current. He plans to continue to release at five years of age.

There's a shiraz, a cabernet sauvignon and a 60-40 cabernet shiraz, the last being a soft, nicely mellowed red with mature flavours starting to appear, and a savoury developed flavour which still has fruit sweetness and charm.

The wines are named after Nicole and their children: Benjamin, Alexander and Georgie.

There's a very delicate (11.1 per cent alcohol) Eden Valley riesling and a sparkling cabernet made in a cremant (low pressure) style.

## Through the grapevine

Judges in the boutique wine packaging awards took the bottle, label, capsule, carton and other marketing materials into account when selecting the winners:

- Logan Wines, Mudgee (winner)
- No. 1 Family Estate, New Zealand (best sparkling bottle)
- Desert Heart Estate, New Zealand (best white)
- Glaetzer Wines, Barossa (best red bottle)
- Kalleske Wines, Barossa (best dessert or fortified and best boutique overall)



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Crafty work... the winemaker at Tanunda; (above) his drinkable handiwork. Photos: David Mariuz