



La Pleiade Shiraz 2005 \$70

The Pleiades or Seven Sisters constellation signifies friendship and can be seen from both the Laughton and Chapoutier home vineyards. It's a stellar shiraz with intense, complex, deep dark fruit, velvet texture, length, balance and finesse. If not cellaring, it's advisable to double decant.



It's not just what's inside that counts – wine labels are becoming an art form in their own right.

WORDS SALLY GUDGEON

Trust Shiraz 2005 \$38

There would be no wine without the sun – hence the sundial image. We may make wine and measure time slightly differently in the 21st century, but the principles remain the same. This central Victorian shiraz ripples with gorgeous dark berry fruits. With hints of earth and chocolate, it's also finely textured and savoury.



I LIKE TO MAKE wines that turn me on," Matt Gant from First Drop Wines says, referring to the flamboyant label that adorns his Minchia Montepulciano from the Adelaide Hills. The label certainly reflects this. It's a raunchy trompe l'oeil, which is both a zipper on a woman's bust and a wine glass. The label's designer, Jeremy Boyd from Lure Creative, describes it as "interactive", with "different layers of interpretation". It pushes the boundaries and would be hard to walk past in a bottle shop.

The label is the first point of contact between the unknown wine and a possible consumer – and can make the difference between success or failure. Without doubt, sex sells, as with the Minchia label, but there

are other considerations such as fashion, appealing design and a stylish, contemporary look that won't date too quickly. The label is a major marketing tool, essential to perfect.

One emerging trend seems to be an interesting story behind a label. The Shelmerdine family's Hat Wines, a chardonnay/viognier/sauvignon blanc and a shiraz/cabernet/merlot, have a poster of a fedora hat stuck to a graffiti-covered wall on their label. The image pays tribute to the Shelmerdines, who established Australia's first steam-powered felt hat factory in Collingwood, in 1876.

The large wraparound labels on the Hat Wines, designed by Marilyn & Sons, incorporate two photographs – one for the red and a different one for the white. The red was shot



First Drop Minchia
Montepulciano 2005 \$35

The label certainly unzips and sheds traditional expectations about montepulciano. Italian versions of this variety tend towards the tannic and brooding, but Gant achieves a vibrant, contemporary style with oodles of sex appeal.

Hat Wines 2004 Red Hat
Cabernet/Shiraz/Merlot \$18

Visit www.hatwines.com to fully appreciate how "now" this label is. It's a finalist in the Melbourne Advertising and Design Club awards. This delicious blend from Heathcote should grace the tables of all hip restaurants. It has vibrant, jazzy fruit, is supple and savoury, and always out late.

Scorpo Aubaine
Chardonnay 2006 \$27

The watercolour/oil pastel featured on the label is by Jennifer Mills. *Aubaine* is a Burgundian synonym for chardonnay and also means "good fortune" or "windfall" in French. This is a lean, mineral, fresh style of chardonnay that leans towards chablis in style.

behind Melbourne's Richmond Station and the white in Hosier Lane, capturing the vibe of the city's laneways, which are alive with bars, clubs and galleries.

While wraparound labels are one way of avoiding separate front and back labels, when does a back label become a front label? The daring front label of La Pleiade Shiraz is a white rectangle with seven holes in it and no script. All the information is on the back, but for legal purposes the back label is really the front label. Confused? Wait, there's more: the seven holes that represent the Pleiades constellation are a mirror image. Only the wine sees the correct image—from inside the bottle.

The idea that wine should have a viewpoint at all is in keeping with the biodynamic

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philosophy of the producers behind this remarkable venture, a partnership between the Chapoutiers in the Rhône Valley and the Laughtons (Jasper Hill) in Heathcote, Victoria. They have planted a new vineyard in Heathcote with Australian shiraz and syrah cuttings from Hermitage in the Rhône Valley.

The Trust label is another inspired by the skies. It appears to have an astrological theme, but is actually a drawing taken from a photo of a 19th-century sundial in Porrera that winemakers Don Lewis and Narelle King spotted on one of their work trips to Spain.

Inspiration for wine labels can come from anywhere, but one of the most popular sources is art. Since 1945, Chateau Mouton Rothschild has commissioned famous artists to design its labels. Australian labels that incorporate art are numerous. John Olsen's paintings feature on the Leeuwin Estate riesling labels and the TarraWarra pinot noir rosé label. The stylish Scorpo label also uses contemporary artists. Its newly released Aubaine shows a vulture; the Noirien, a gorilla's hand. Art and wine is a winning combination—and it doesn't date. 