

CREATIVE FINAL TOUCHES

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE LITTLE THINGS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR GIFTING

BY W. BLAKE GRAY

For six weeks at the end of the year, your customers are looking for gifts. They're making lists; and wine, with its current cultural cachet, checks off a lot of boxes. All the more reason not to overlook the obvious at this critical time of year. Optimizing your customers' gift-giving experience can be as simple as double-checking aspects of signage, stocking and service.



Endcaps are your fast movers and sure shots—make them count. Keep them clean, well-stocked—and as inviting as possible. Consider the cases themselves; can you put suppliers' graphics to work for you? What sort of POS material is available? Case cards, neck hangers, recipes? Will they complement or compete with your signage? Take advantage of endcaps' visibility; signs and special pricing should be easy to read from a short distance.



It seems like celebrities go through phases of side projects. Once upon a time we had William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy and the like recording albums. Cookbooks and restaurants have had their day, too. Now, anyone who isn't Dancing With the Stars seems to have a wine label. Fortunately we're in an era when good wine is easy to source, so few if any of these labels are the vinous equivalent of Shatner singing.



But remember that celebrity wines usually look a lot like the rest of the pack. Whether you are stocking Drew Barrymore, Sofia Coppola or both, a supplier's neck hanger or simple shelf talker will help potential fans notice them. The same holds for sports wines; for example, don't assume browsers will know that former NFL stars Drew Bledsoe and Charles Woodson are behind Doubleback and Twentyfour, respectively. And teeing up a "Golf Lovers' Wine" sign near Greg Norman or Arnold Palmer wines will only help.



If you have the luxury of an easily rotated display table or a central rack for specials, this is a great time of year to group wines by type or theme, with an eye on gift potential. Value-Added Packs are one way to go. But don't limit yourself.

STAFF PICKS RULE. In this age of ratings fatigue, in-store recommendations are still very much in demand and present an

authentic way of reaffirming your sense of expertise as a gateway to the wine industry's best.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE FUN.

There's a reason Marilyn Merlot is one of the most-searched wines on Wine Searcher—a lot of holiday consumers are looking for something that will get laughs when the wrapping paper comes off. Ask your employees which labels they find most fun—you'll have ten before you know it.



GREEN WINES FOR THE CRUNCHY CROWD.

Everybody has a tree-hugging cousin. Plus, lots of wines do not tout their eco-pedigree; show off your inside knowledge with signage like "Fish Friendly Farming protects rivers from erosion" or "The label won't tell you but we will: this estate practicing biodynamic."

PARTY TIME? You get asked about "party wines" a lot; chances are, there are people *thinking* that but not asking; gathering a gaggle of "Party Bubbies Under \$15" can be a timely prompt. Another variation: "Host wines for Around \$20."

ELEVATE THE FINE PRINT.

Artist labels make for natural groupings; ditto labels with animals, from cartoonish critters to regal stallions. And you might be surprised at how many wine labels with first names can be aggregated for gifting (Josh Cellars, Katherine's Vineyard, et al). ■

