

PASSION: The driving force behind GLD SA

Nina Chalmers, Director (left) and Julie Capurso, Senior Designer

Behind every great stand-out label design, is a talented group of designers, artists and printers. People who inject into the task of designing a new label, something that is original, creative and often, outstanding. A product's label must demand the attention of the consumer, so they pick up the product and ultimately decide to purchase. With the Australian wine industry a multi-billion dollar contributor to the country's success, it is only natural that many of the best label designs produced are sought by the wineries in South Australia and across the country.

One of the companies producing outstanding wine labels – as well as other packaging – is Adelaide-based Graphic Language Design Pty Ltd. “Labels Plus” spoke to Director Nina Chalmers, about the studio, the label industry, and what drives her design consultancy to continually reach for the top.

“The studio was established back in 1994 and I took over in early 2012,” explained Nina. “Since its inception, Graphic Language Design (or GLD), has had extensive experience in corporate branding and publication design. We are also packaging design specialists and have a particular passion for wine label design. Today, GLD’s clients are both Australian-based – in Adelaide or elsewhere in Australia – and wine-related companies overseas.”

While GLD’s staff isn’t huge, the personal touch is of utmost importance to the team and their clients. “Our clients have the advantage of working directly with the designers involved in their project, rather than working through an account manager. Nina employs a full-time senior designer and a contract web developer who she said are exceptionally talented. In addition, she employs a contract bookkeeping and administration team for support and has relationships with experience freelance designers, photographers, marketing and public relations consultants and IP specialists, who are brought into projects as needed.

Nina said that she’d always had a creative bent and knew that this love would influence the kind of employment she pursued. “I studied Fine Art at university and majored in Printmaking,” she said. “Shortly after graduation, I started my career as an illustrator and designer in a boutique packaging design studio.

For a change of pace and more a varied experience, I then joined a large news media organisation, where I was exposed to a wide variety of design platforms from magazines to newspapers and produced a range of marketing materials.

“A move to the editorial side of the organisation, led to my love of design strategy through the creation of infographics. I also developed an avid interest in the successful integration of words and images to produce an evocative result. This move also led to my completing a Masters degree in Journalism, which I thoroughly enjoyed.”

Asked about her first major project after purchasing the studio, Nina clearly remembers what it was. “At the time, we had no idea how big the client would become, but it was a previously family-owned Barossa-based winery, which had recently been sold. Our Senior Designer, Julie Capurso, had just finished the design evolution of their flagship wines. She had established a good rapport with the person tasked with managing label design and the project had run very smoothly. It’s no secret that the relationship between the client and the designer is essential for the successful outcome of a project.

“Effective communication between client and designer at the beginning of a project, leads to a relationship built on trust and eventually, a brand with integrity. If the design brief has been met, this ultimately leads to a strong relationship between the brand itself and the customer. Fortunately, over time, we also garnered the trust of the new winery owner. As the company was restructured for growth, and roles changed within the organisation, we were given the opportunity to put forward our case to retain their label and packaging design. Our bid was successful due to our track record and the relationships we’d nurtured, and we continue to build on that with every project.”

When it comes to market segments, Nina said that wine label and packaging is highly-specialised and a market that the GLD team loves to be involved with. “We tend to work with boutique wineries and encourage them to consider every element of their brand, not just their labels,” said Nina.

“For a brand to gain traction and maintain integrity in the marketplace, it needs to be presented consistently. This helps to build familiarity and trust with the customer. The need for brand consistency applies to everything from their website to their corporate brochures and even uniforms. Good design strategy takes the entire customer experience into account. For example, if the winery has a cellar door, it’s as important for the brand owner to share the cellar door experience with the designer, as it is for them to collaborate with the designer on the finer details of their label design, like paper and bottle selection.

“Rather than limiting ourselves to a single, niche market, we have the skills and experience in broader areas of design besides packaging, so it makes good



"GLD have played an instrumental role in helping us to build the Ius brand, and allow us to hit the target for positioning and style across a number of different platforms and price-points. They clearly understood our brief from the beginning and have gone above and beyond to ensure that both our and our customers' expectations have been exceeded."

Sam Brand, Director - IUS Wines



business sense for a brand to use that expertise across the board!"

She said the principles of good design apply, regardless of the product. "Whatever the product is inside the packaging, the design process is the same. It starts with the brief. From the outset, it is essential for us to gain as much knowledge as possible about the company, its products, their competitors, who their target market is, and where their customers are based. This is usually carried out at a preliminary meeting, and it's very helpful if these points are covered in a written brief, so we have a broad picture of what we're dealing with."

"For example, you may not think pharmaceutical packaging needs much shelf appeal because product selection is based on the contents, not the appearance of the product. However, it is very important to understand what ailment the medicine is treating: like whether the patients are elderly, and who may have difficulty seeing small text. The designer would need to consider whether they require packaging for a variety of dosages that need to be differentiated by colour, for example, to assist pharmacists. To deliver the right message, we need to know what story needs to be communicated and who the intended consumer will be."

Returning to her initial point, Nina said one of the most important tools for GLD is the written brief. "Even for a client who has never briefed a designer before, a written brief can be very helpful as a basis for discussion, at the beginning of a project. It encourages less experienced clients to marshal their thoughts. It organises the particular points we need to consider. All of which establishes a picture for us of whom their product will be aimed at, where it sits in the market and how the products will be sold."

With years of experience both here and overseas, Nina was asked what changes she'd seen in the label industry in the past five years. "It's been a rough few years for the Australian wine industry," she said, "and now that things are starting to look up, the market is more competitive than ever. Digital printing has provided wonderful opportunities for boutique wineries with smaller volumes, and there is an enormous variety of wines on shelves. To stand out, the challenge is on to produce

something outstanding. "To achieve this, we're finding that our clients are more open to increasing their production. We're seeing constant new developments in paper stocks and more of a willingness to consider premium papers or other embellishments, to influence the sensory experience of wine selection. A good example is the use of more than one foil on a label. While this technology is not new, the additional cost is now something that some brand owners are willing to consider. There's also been increased interest in the application of specialist inks in label design. Recently, thermochromatic inks are being requested, not only to indicate ideal temperature, but to enhance the theatre of label design. Competition provides a challenge for brand designers, but also opens the door to some very exciting possibilities for label and packaging design."

Asked about the studio's involvement with label printers, Nina said one of the initial questions raised when being briefed was who will be printing the labels? "Wherever possible, we'll work closely with the printers to ensure the best paper stock and production process is in place, to ensure our clients get the end-result they're expecting. We've worked with a lot of printers around Australia, and we understand their strengths. We work towards maximising those competencies to our clients' benefit." She said she was a firm believer in playing to your strengths, and the studio was continuing to learn every day. "We may be experts in design strategy, and very experienced in production, but we also know our limitations. It's very rewarding to spend time in a pressroom devising the best solution to a production challenge, with the people who know the printing process, inks and presses best. Some clients prefer a printer with whom they have an existing relationship, and that case GLD works with them."

"We work with a number of outstanding printers around Australia and have a variety of world-class label printers right here in Adelaide. We attend press checks, either with our clients or on their behalf, and we are happy to attend press checks interstate, if required."

"Most of the printers we work with have reps who make the effort to come and see us. They keep us abreast of the latest developments, new finishes and paper stocks. This applies to

printers based in Adelaide and interstate. It makes sense that if someone has recently shown us an exquisite example of embossing, naturally they will be top of mind when we next require that level of emboss detail."

And the studio's experience with digital production? Nina said the results had been "brilliant!"

"The fact that you can achieve foil, embossing and high build from a digital press, without the need for high printing volume is fantastic. Cost-effective individual numbering, and label sets with multiple designs, or colour variations in one run, have also made digital printing very appealing."

Where does she see the studio industry heading in the next decade? "As passionate visual communicators, designers possess two unique traits that set them apart, and which I believe, will stand them in good stead in the next decade. Firstly, they possess a deeper empathy for how other people experience their environment, a product or a space. Because of this, I see more designers in business leadership roles and a greater emphasis being placed on the human experience, to increase profits."

The other area where designers excel is visual story-telling. This is becoming more and more valuable as technology and social media develops. The internet cannot be overlooked for influencing the way in which people read news or consumers

experience brand stories. We no longer read stories in a linear form - like the single news source of the past, from start to finish. Rather, we jump from one story to the next, watching snippets of videos and glossing over photos, spending mere seconds in a plethora of apps. Businesses would do well to task designers with telling their brand stories across various platforms, breaking them into bite-sized chunks, that work together as a whole. Brand owners can no longer rely on one avenue of promotion."

And her thoughts on using more low-cost centres like Asia, for future production in the design area? "I am concerned," she said, "that Australian industries are being lured into taking advantage of cheaper design and print production out of Asia. A few of our clients have tried that route, and while some have had good results with printing the first time, the general consensus is that quality can be inconsistent and unless you have a team on the ground overseas monitoring quality, with each print run it's virtually impossible to be sure you'll get what was agreed to at the outset. We've discussed at length that effective communication has a direct influence on the outcome of any project, and I believe the language barrier has the potential to be an enormous stumbling block to a successful result."

