

Leaders of the Pack

by Randy Hofbauer

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The winners of PL Buyer's 7th Annual Private Label Packaging Awards prove that store brand packaging has come a long way in terms of creativity, functionality and aesthetic appeal.

The days of generic white labels are long gone. These days, a private label product must come in a well-designed package if it is to stand out on the shelf. Bold graphics, strong functionality and a good product description can turn a boring bag or box into a work of art that gets consumers' attention and wins the sale.

"Boring" certainly does not describe any of the entries in PL Buyer's 7th Annual Private Label Packaging Awards. More than 200 submissions comprising more than 750 products were received — a record number for the competition — and so many of them were award-worthy. But knowing that not all of the entries could receive awards, PL Buyer called on the editors of its sister packaging publications to pick out the best of the best.

Although the judges are packaging experts, it still took them a good deal of time and concentration to make their decisions. The judges poked and prodded, read each entry's mission statement, and even had a few friendly debates about which submissions truly were award-worthy. After plenty of discussion and two rounds of cuts, 21 winning entries were left standing.

PL Buyer's editors didn't let the judges hog all the fun, though. This year, Editor in Chief Kathie Canning and Managing Editor Randy Hofbauer decided to get in on the action, saving an award for one particular entry they both loved.

Congratulations to all the winners, and a big thanks to those who submitted! You all made this the biggest and best Private Label Packaging Awards competition yet.

MEET THE JUDGES

It takes some of the best minds in the packaging business to pick the best packages from the bunch. As we have done in years past, PL Buyer asked the editors of its sister packaging publications — BrandPackaging, Food & Beverage Packaging and Flexible Packaging — to pick out which packages were the cream of the crop. After the judges made their decisions, each had a chance to select his or her favorite entry and share thoughts on what made that product stand out from the rest.

Here's your chance to meet each of the judges and find out his or her favorite pick.

Pan Demetrakakes, editor in chief, Food & Beverage Packaging.

Pan's favorite packaging: A&P's 150th Anniversary products.

Pan says: "I like the idea of a reusable package that serves to reinforce the store's identity in the consumer's mind."

Pauline Hammerbeck, editor in chief, BrandPackaging.

Pauline's favorite packaging: A&P's Via Roma pasta and pasta sauce.

Pauline says: "The brand throws category cues (tomatoes, vines) on their head with black and white labels, authentic photography, etc. Every panel on the paperboard packaging is well designed, which reaches out to the shopper regardless of how the package is merchandised."

Sayre Kos, editor in chief, Flexible Packaging.

Sayre's favorite packaging: A&P's 150th anniversary line.

Sayre says: "The print and design on these products are all technically sound, aesthetically pleasing and use a strong, appealing combination of colors and images. But what makes these products stand out is their potential staying power. You know that long after the popcorn or peppermints have been consumed, A&P shoppers will keep these around the house, either as simple decorations or small storage containers. This delivers A&P's message for months and years to come while giving some benefits beyond food storage/protection to the consumer."

Stephanie Hildebrandt, associate editor, BrandPackaging.

Stephanie's favorite packaging: Fresh Market's organic jams/jellies.

Stephanie says: "Everything about it looks homemade, which allows consumers to make the assumption that the product is natural or organic. The fact that an employee's handwriting was scanned in for the label was also a creative idea to reinforce that homemade feel."



RETAILER: The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P)

Product: Via Roma pasta and pasta sauce

Packaging Type: Carton and jar

Mission: To capture the shopper's attention and make him or her smile.

Comments: "I think this packaging is really authentic!" Hildebrandt exclaims. "And it's not that it just looks authentic, but it is authentic because a photographer ... actually photographed these Tuscan natives. So you're seeing Italian people in their own environment."

"You see these two old people ... enjoying each other's company," Demetrakakes adds. "It's going to make consumers flash back to memories of when grandma cooked up a big bowl of pasta. The typography is simple, yet varied."

"The logo [is] kind of an emblem that also conveys the heritage," Hammerbeck notes. "It's obvious they made an investment — everything is really well done, from the photography to the typography."



RETAILER: The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P)

Product: Hartford Reserve apple pie

Packaging Type: Windowed box

Mission: To give a premium look and feel with a primarily black package that has elegant photography and copy.

Comments: "It has really nice typography," Demetrakakes remarks. "Simple, but it also conveys that premium aspect that I think they're trying to accomplish here."

"When you go into the store, I don't feel like you see a lot of pies in black packaging," Hildebrandt says. "Also, the window helps a lot so you can see the texture of the pie [and] get a feel for what it looks like and what you're getting."



RETAILER: The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P)

Product: Hartford Reserve artisan cheese

Packaging Type: Label

Mission: To communicate the quality and the type, origin and flavor of each cheese.

Comments: "I picked them [for their] use of colors, design and typography," Kos notes. "The combination really gets the product to elevate its status. And also, these labels here — the Wisconsin Cheese and the ACS (American Cheese Society) Winner [labels] — really give the products some credibility."

"[The labels] also help in the selection process maybe for someone who's not as familiar with different cheeses," Hammerbeck adds. "The fact that there's the little graphic of the animal from which the cheese came — you know, the cow for cow's milk, the goat for goat's milk — that helps with the selection process. I think that's pretty unique."

