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# LURING WITH





# LOOKS

The face is the fortune not only for beautiful film stars but for premium liquor as well, says **VIKRAM ACHANTA**

WALK INTO ANY half-decent bar or retail shop, and the first thing that strikes you is the proliferation of brands, with an ever increasing number of wines, spirits and beers crowding the shelves. As the Indian beverage market soars, retail shops become slicker and the number of bars increases, you as a consumer will start to see all the familiar and unfamiliar names you're used to seeing on your overseas trips.

In a sense, the alcohol business is much like the perfume one; the product inside is only part of the appeal, the others are the brand image and the packaging, the latter a sum of two parts, the shape of the bottle and the label.

So what's an entrepreneur to do when he tries to enter the premium end of the beverage market in India? Entrepreneurs, especially those targeting the premium consumer, are spending money on packaging. A case in point is Sipping Spirits out of Goa, set up by Prasanna, a first-generation entrepreneur, who launched the Resolute range of premium vodkas, bridging the gap between Smirnoff and Absolut. Black, regular and pink, are the three variants of Resolute. Taking on two of the world's biggest beverage brands is no easy task, so Prasanna had a unique hip flask-shaped bottle designed and to complement it, applied the labels of the Resolute bottles via a technique called DECAL, which gives the impression that the label is printed on the bottle. The innovative shape won the Platinum award for bottle design, at the 2010 SIP awards ceremony in San Diego.



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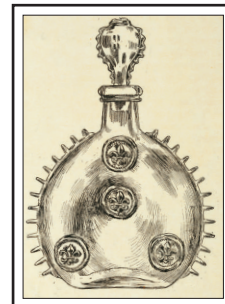


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Of course, innovating with packaging is not the sole prerogative of the small entrepreneur. Some of the world's biggest beverage brands spice up their brands with design innovations. As Bruno Yvon, managing director of Moët Hennessy, India says, "What makes the value of a product is its rarity and desirability: both beverage and packaging participate in creating the value. Some consumers are in search of unique and rare bottles; dedicated aficionados who wish to make their encounter with a brand go beyond the usual. To offer these customers what they are looking for, creators craft limited edition bottles, which by association of a very rare beverage with another element like a precious metal, designer, artist, etc., express the values of the brand and its

uniqueness in a striking way." Through the years, Moët Hennessy has created limited edition bottles or packaging interpretations, in association with designers, like Karim Rachid or Andree Putmann or with fashion houses like Louis Vuitton and Pucci.



Another example is Remy's Louis XIII Grand Champagne Cognac. Each decanter is unique, made by 11 craftsmen using Baccarat Crystal, and the neck decorated with 24-carat gold. The cognac is a unique

blend of 1200 *eaux de vie* (clear, colourless fruit brandy) from Grand Champagne. The decanter was designed to reveal and enhance the Cognac. The first impression of Louis XIII is one of sight; by letting the light filter through the crystal, the mahogany colour is revealed. The decanter is decorated with fleur-



de-lys, the royal signature and a reference to Louis XIII of France, the first monarch to acknowledge cognac as a different category.

There is also, interestingly enough, the world's most expensive bottle, the Tequila Ley.925 which sells a 6-year-old 100 percent Blue Agave Tequila in a platinum bottle for ₹1 crore. Someone actually bought one, back in the days when derivatives were still a good word. In these economy-stricken times you can get a half gold, half platinum version for about ₹71 lakh. The company now produces a ₹7 crore bottle in platinum, encrusted with diamonds. If you know someone who's interested in buying it, you'll even get a ₹61 lakh finders fee!

You can't expect Single Malt companies to stay in the background, letting Cognac and Champagne steal the limelight. Macallan embarked on The Cire Perdue project in co-operation with Lalique Crystal, using the Cire Perdue or 'lost wax' process

where the wax mould is destroyed at the end of the process, making the work of art truly unique. And not just for any old malt, but for their 64-year-old Macallan, the oldest ever bottled, which they felt needed a unique decanter. It's been vatted from three casks, all sherry-seasoned oak—the first in 1942, second in 1945 and the third in 1946.

A Macallan representative said, "It is an example of true partnership and reflects the craftsmanship we use to create our whisky".

After the public unveiling in Paris on April 6, 2010, the decanter goes on a world tour, and in each city, a 100ml sample of the whisky will be auctioned with two Lalique crystal tumblers. All for a good cause and fittingly so—the cause is water, because whisky is after all, the water of life, so if you're feeling wealthy, turn up at Sotheby's New York on November 15, 2010, for the auction of the decanter!

