Wine, Women and... sales!?! 
By Judy Serra Lieberman
the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, the beverage world has certainly been rocking— and rolling out a host of specialized products specifically targeted toward female beverage consumers. This is a lucrative market: Women make about 70% of wine purchases, making up more than 60% of the wine drinking public.

Leslie Shrocco, in her book, Wine For Women, claims the female shopper is “adventurous... willing to try new varieties, regions and producers if they offer top quality and value.” Further, women make up 60% of high-end wine consumers (more than $15/bottle). Still, they are hardly wine snobs: She says that women are open to the convenience of single-serve sizes and screw caps, are not as ratings driven as males, and select on taste and style, and word of mouth from their friends.

In packaging, pitch and product profile, a variety of wines and spirits have, over the last 2+ years, aimed at this appealing target. Among the many, there are choices both frilly and silly: Seduction dresses its bottle in a sheer pink negligee; and Click introduced a line during Fall Fashion Week ’05 called Bootleg – Italian wines with bottles snugly wrapped to simulate a leather boot, zipper, Made in Italy tag, and all. Among others, labels and names make the pitch: Working Girl White, Mad Housewife, Rose the Riveter

In 2004, Brown Forman, appealing to women and the low-carb trend, offered One.6 and One.9. Expanding on this notion, Beringer, in June ’05 introduced White Lie Early Season Chardonnay as “the first wine designed by women for women” - a nod to the female creative team. Beringer emphasizes the wine’s lower alcohol content (which also makes it lower in carbs and calories). This focus has a scientific basis: Since women metabolize alcohol differently than men, the lower count means they can have that second glass and feel less tipsy. Flavor and refinement is the approach taken by Camus with its Josephine Cognac: “Careful blending and aging in old Limousin oak barrels creates a slightly sweeter, rounder taste.” Named for Napoleon’s style-setting wife, the bottle is tall and narrow, and the packaging decorated in Art Nouveau style.

There are a number of examples of female-slanted marketing throughout all industries and plenty of comment about it.

Olympic Figure Skating Champion Peggy Fleming Jenkins, and her husband Greg, owners of Fleming Jenkins Vineyards & Winery, Russian River, CA, introduced Victoria Rose, a wine created especially to raise funds for breast cancer research. Their interest is personal and reflects Peggy’s 1998 bout with breast cancer, but the imagery of a strong sports idol will resonate with women, or any whose lives have been touched by breast cancer.

A SLATE entry, dated October 7, 2005, penned by Mike Steinberger, explores the whole women/wine issue, in amusing style, signaled by his subhead “Finally, a magazine for lady winos.” The publication to which he refers is Wine Adventure, introduced in July 2005, targeting women oenophiles. While Steinberger acknowledges the “Men’s club” flavor of other publications, he also points out the many influential female wine writers, winemakers, and sommeliers, that are playing a significant and rewarding role in what was once perceived as a man’s world.

Jennifer Chotzi Rosen, James Beard Award-winning Internet wine writer, weighed in on the issue in her article “Girls Just Wanna Have Wha...uh?” The piece provides a series of good chuckles, but has a serious, and thought provoking conclusion: “I find wines designed by focus-group tend towards lowest-common denominator blandness. They lose all relation to the living, ever-changing, mystery-in-a-bottle, and then wine ceases to be the most interesting of all drinks, and becomes just another ‘product.” vinchotzi.com

Don’t Think Pink, by Lisa Johnson and Andrea Learned, business and marketing consultants, is a book about strategies for marketing to women as intelligent, complex human beings. Learned hosts a weblog, Learned on Women, which this year has had a number of interesting posts – written by women – weighing in on the wine for women surge.

Color Commentary: So many of the “girl brands” are done up in rosy shades. I asked a retailer, Costas Mazouras at Gotham Wines in NYC, about it. “No, not pink... blue!” he said, claiming that he noticed more women reaching for labels with rich, blue, jewel-like tones.
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David Breitstein, who, with his

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California, says gender has little
to do with his sales. “All of our
customers – men and women –
expect us to provide them with
rare and distinguished selec-
tions of the finest wines, and
rare spirits. Our collectors, how-
ever, are mostly men, who often
buy as an investment. That may
be a gender difference.” He has
a different view on marketing: “I
prefer that we market to every-
one, emphasizing lasting quality
over today’s trend.”

Constellation Wines U.S., while
acknowledging the importance of the
female market (their Arbor Mist line
has long been a favorite with women)
is careful to maintain flexibility in its
approach. In October ’05, they
released results of their own con-
sumer study – Project Genome – that
identified six key categories of wine
consumers. Lisa Farrell, VP of com-
 munications, described the groups and
their preferences. (see box on left)

Of these categories, only one – The
Image Seeker – was predominantly
male; the others skewed somewhat or
more to women. Women made up the
majority of overwhelmed consumers.
Farrell points out that, “By understand-
ing a consumer’s shopping behavior and
preferences, we are able to pursue these
segments and help our retailers, and
restaurant partners be more effective.”

That overall goal is the driving force
behind all marketing plans. While some
of the products and pitches have seen
success, others have been criticized as
being insulting to women. The final
dates will be cast by consumers them-
selves, tallied in register receipts and on
company spreadsheets. One thing is cer-
tain: Controversy and discussion brings
more attention to the beverage industry.
Certainly, some credit must be given to
adventurous product development, in-
novative packaging, and aggressive
marketing that heightens awareness
and makes the world of beverage more
accessible to women – as well as men.

• The Enthusiast – needs to
buy wine from a respected
winery

• The Image Seeker – cutting
dge, impressive quality
(Black Box)

• The Traditionalist – sophisti-
cated adventurer; their own
favorite choice (Mondavi)

• The Satisfied Sipper – White
Zinfandel, Arbor Mist

• The Savvy Shopper – value
and convenience (Black Box)

• The Overwhelmed – intimi-
dated by wine/food pairings;
uncomfortable ordering wine
in a restaurant.

John Riley, beverage director for
the Brown Derby International
Wine Center in Springfield,
Missouri warns that “cute pitches
and packaging can be just a fad,
unless it’s backed up by quality. If
there’s good word of mouth, or if
an item has received good press
or ratings, our customers know it
and buy.” He admits that some
packaging and labels do work:
The 4-can pack of Sofia sold
really well, and Three-Legged
Dog – actually any label with ani-
mals – is a real draw. But the
product has to have legitimacy.

Dustin Mitzel, general manager
of four Happy Harry’s Bottle
Shops in North Dakota, makes
these observations of his female
customers: “I think women have
their own grapevine, where they
share shopping secrets and tell
each other about great finds.

Yellowtail was a good example:
Women heard about it from
friends and bought it like crazy.”

Men, he thinks, rely on outside
information and ratings from
more official sources; women
have their own network that
steers them to trends and styles.

“In our shops, Sex and the City
moved our female customers into
cocktails. Suddenly, one day,
they all wanted to know how to
make a chocolate martini.” He
notes the growth of wine sales
over the past five years, to male
and female alike: “Our cus-
tomers are dining out more, talk-
ing to sommeliers, becoming
more concerned about what’s in
the bottle, rather than what’s on
it.” With one vivid exception: Red
Truck Red. “Maybe it’s because
we’re in North Dakota, but that
really struck a cord with both
genders. It was a huge success.”

Mark Wessels, manager at
MacArthur Beverage Wine &
Spirits in Washington, D.C.,
says that market research does
not necessarily reflect his cus-
tomer base. “About 90% of our
sales are wines. Our customers
are wine savvy, or we teach them
to be,” he said. Perhaps
because of the store’s reputation
as a fine wine shop, rather than a
broader-based, supermarket style
unit. He draws female customers
who are serious about wine, and
over the last few years has
noticed an increase in younger
female shoppers, eager to enter
into the wine market. And spir-
its? “Women tend to buy white
spirits with prestige labels, like
Grey Goose and Belvedere
Vodka and some premium gins.
They’re not big buyers of single
malts or single barrel bourbons.”

Sales
Talk