

Q&A with Invivo Wines

Rob Cameron and Tim Lightbourne are seriously creative with the marketing of Invivo Wines, including sponsoring a gig with Crowded House atop London's New Zealand House

How was Invivo born?

RC: We started three-and-a-half years ago. I was a consultant winemaker for a UK-based company working around Europe. Tim was in marketing, based in the City of London.

TL: I was working for L'Oreal and before that I managed HP Sauce. I'd carried grapes during 2002 in Burgundy, but had no other wine experience. We've been friends since school and we wanted to come back to New Zealand, so we started talking about launching our own brand, but doing it a little differently.

RC: For about six months we worked on a comprehensive business plan, mainly in the pub. We needed to tell the story from scratch and decided we needed a striking label. So we briefed Zambesi, a New Zealand fashion house, on the brand, saying we wanted to take it to international markets, but while supporting the arts with the brand. The "star" is visible in everything we do, linking everything back to the wines.

TL: The origin was a compass and it gradually evolved into a star, representing the areas of New Zealand we are sourcing from. Invivo means "life", and wine is all about celebrating life.

What style of wines did you aim for?

RC: We wanted to bring a slightly more European style to the wine, with more focus on structure and texture.

TL: We began with Sauvignon Blanc and Otago Pinot, and last year introduced a Marlborough Pinot Gris and Pinot Gris rosé. We are about making wines people want to drink and because we don't own vineyards we can't get stuck with styles people may no longer want.

Your marketing is a little different from the average wine brand ...

TL: We support creative industries, sponsoring an artist every month. So we support art galleries and exhibitions in New Zealand and Australia. We've worked with an artist in the Bronx and ran a promotion with Zambesi offering Invivo drinkers a trip to join us at New Zealand Fashion Week.

We've just signed up a New Zealand band, Eru Dangerspiel and we're sponsoring their tour. We did a gig recently with Crowded House, on top of New Zealand House in London, which was pretty awesome. But it's not just about doing things for the hell of it. It all comes back to the brand and what it is about.

What inspired this strategy?

TL: I've taken my cues from other industries, from L'Oreal to Danone's HP Sauce, and looked at their strategies. With these guys everything goes towards the position in the market. We have this position which is a little bit different, a little contemporary.

RC: Besides the big companies our industry has not had a lot of pure marketeers like Tim. It's been based on small producers doing everything, so there hasn't been much classic marketing experience.

TL: I don't look so much at wine, but spirits like 42 Below vodka, which is pretty innovative, and the Absolut campaigns – activity that executes well across countries, more in line with luxury goods. There isn't much wine in the market that'll look outside of the category.

How can you do that in wine?

TL: We are just giving people something different to talk about



Cameron and Lightbourne have turned marketing wine into an art form

and this has become ever more important.

Does social media play a role in what you do?

TL: We use Facebook and Twitter. It's great for flagging up a tasting and communicating with consumers – with advertising you have to put up with all sorts of noise before you get through, but then you also have to be quite careful about what you say with social media – you may be in a bad mood one night and whatever you say affects your brand.

Do premium New World wines need stronger brand identity than their European equivalents?

TL: Absolutely. You have to stand out on the shelf. A comparatively large percentage of New Zealand wines are in the premium bracket. If you are

going to buy a £20 Pinot from either Burgundy or Otago, I know where I would go, but people are more likely to pick up a Burgundy, which shows we have to market our wines well.

What's in the pipeline?

RC: Plenty of new marketing activity, but we are also launching a new lower-alcohol, lower-calorie wine, Bella. We've taken a parcel of Sauvignon in the vineyard. It will probably launch in the UK next summer.

TL: Bella is about 30% fewer calories and 3% less abv so we'll show this on the front label, while the back label will have a full nutritional table, which isn't something you see on too many wines. Buyers we have been talking to love the concept of a natural lower-alcohol lunchtime wine and they don't want to have to sell Riesling the whole time.

Compiled by Andrew Catchpole