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Fine Ad. Be Seduced: Analyzing the Selling of "Taste"

The makers of alcoholic beverages conduct some of the most interesting advertising campaigns. Vendors sell everything from beers to clear malt beverages by associating them with good times. Whether connected with attractive models on the beach or cigar-smoking buddies in a pool hall, the modest price of their products and the obvious connection between the product and the promised effect (inebriation) make for an easy sell. Wine importers face special complications when designing advertisements to attract buyers to their more pricey wares. If customers can achieve the effect of inebriation for fifteen dollars a case of beer, why exactly would they pay out twenty or forty dollars for a bottle containing one tenth the volume?

The makers of a "Bordeaux" advertisement published in an August 2003 issue of the consumer magazine, The Wine Spectator, emphasize the idea of "taste"—both in the sense that wines from this region of France are flavorful, and by implying that the viewer is a person of good taste, refinement, even class. A carefully generated visual atmosphere, use of carefully manipulated wine glasses, and cleverly suggestive language promote the product and manipulate the viewer, while at the same time flattering "him."

The Wine Spectator features articles reviewing various wines, growing regions, and vintages, as well as information on other gourmet cooking and eating. The magazine itself might be considered a glorified advertisement, since the buyers guide includes

information aimed at *connoisseurs* stocking their wine cellars. The range of other advertisements in this issue of the magazine confirms the suspicion that the assumed audience has a good deal of disposable income. One notes advertisements for fine cigars, luxury and foreign automobiles, five-star vacation resorts and the like. Many of these products might interest both men and women, but there is no advertisement in this issue featuring a product mostly associated with women. Thus from the advertiser's perspective, this is a magazine for men: particularly for men with taste, or money, or perhaps who would like to be seen as having these qualities.

Visually, a deep black background emphasizes the partial images of two filled wine-glasses. The image is simple, no hands or people or dining room or clutter—just the curves of the goblets. By using careful lighting, the photographer brings out just the edges of the goblets, emphasizing the curviness, the silhouettes. In themselves, the silhouettes might not seem charged with meaning. However, if one anticipates a male viewer and connects the slightly suggestive quality of the images with the implications in the advertisement's language, then the advertiser's strategy becomes more clear.

The language and tone of the ad project that message that implicitly male viewers ought to purchase this product so as to confirm their classiness and, by extension, their attractiveness toward women. A large, script "B" underlies the word "BORDEAUX™" in white; below it one reads the slogan: "Fine Wines. Be Seduced" set in a smaller, red and white, san-serif type. Finally, in a smaller sized white font, the following sentences describe the origins of the wine and the Bordeaux region of France, but with an emphasis again on seduction or allure:

There is little in this world more alluring than a glass of Bordeaux.

Centuries of Cabernet and Merlot blending mastery, combined with a unique terrain and climate give birth to refinement and equilibrium of a highly enticing nature. www.bordeaux.com

Superficially describing the taste or flavor of the wine (“refinement and equilibrium”), the deliberate choice of words for this ad copy brings home the promise that the viewer and buyer of this product will attain for himself “refinement and equilibrium.

Appealing to emotions rather than logic, the address to a male viewer and the promise of the advertisement are keyed by the words “alluring” and “enticing,” both of which reinforce the underlying joke: since “men,” who supposedly have only one thing on their mind, must know the one thing more alluring than a glass of wine. Too tasteful to be explicit, the language is suggestive—“Fine wines. Be seduced.” With a subtle wink and a tip of the cigar, we “men” know that it is not a glass of wine by which we desire to be seduced. Or perhaps the message could better be summarized: first the wine, then the woman?

Reconsidering the two suggestive images of wine goblets, their emphasis on curves stands-in for the attractive woman in a bikini who would be in their place if this were an advertisement for Budwiser. But we have better taste than that, since, we drink Bordeaux; we've been seduced.