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A BRAND WITH BOTTLE

I spoke to a number of marketers, maybe three or four different groups, before I spoke to Leigh. And he was the first one that said 'pour me a beer. . . this is great beer, we can sell this'. None of the other guys were interested in what the beer tasted like.

DAVID WALSH

ANOTHER, QUITE DIFFERENT TYPE OF LABEL WOULD

have a critical influence on the conception of MONA. In the creation of labels for David's new Moo Brew beers and the relaunch of Moorilla wines, one can glimpse the beginnings of MONA's orientation and aesthetic. It was a story told to me by MONA's Creative Director, Leigh Carmichael, who was drafted in specifically to work on the Moo Brew labels and then went on to work with David to create MONA's brand.

A craft brewery was one of the first things Walsh had added to the winery he'd purchased from Claudio Alcorso. Claudio had planted the vines, established the Moorilla wine brand and set up a dining and function centre at the winery. David had extended and improved these enterprises considerably, with the Moorilla Museum of Antiquities opening in 1999, the guest pavilions opening in 2000 and the Ether function building opening in 2005. Leigh Carmichael impressed on me how Moo Brew beer was David's first stab at significant creativity and the launching of a product of his own.

I can remember supervising a student thesis on the culture of beer in Australia around that time. I'd lived in England before, during and after the revolutionary Campaign for Real Ale (begun in 1971), and had been astonished to find that there were barely any craft beers in Australia when I arrived in 1991, and that the beer market was dominated by a few high-volume commercial breweries. The thesis tried to explain the absence of craft beers in Australia in light of the fact that they had dominated recent beer history in Europe, North America and elsewhere.

There are now over 1000 craft beer-makers in Australia, although they still only produce two per cent of the beer consumed. (The Australian Craft Beer Industry Association is a toddler that only

formed in 2011.) Moo Brew was one of the pioneers in the field, and was launched by an outsider with very little to go on except a gut instinct and a love of good beer. When Carmichael was taken on to do the designs for the labels, a pilsner, a pale ale and a wheat beer had been conceived and trialled and David had chosen the bottle, a somewhat radical miniature champagne shape.

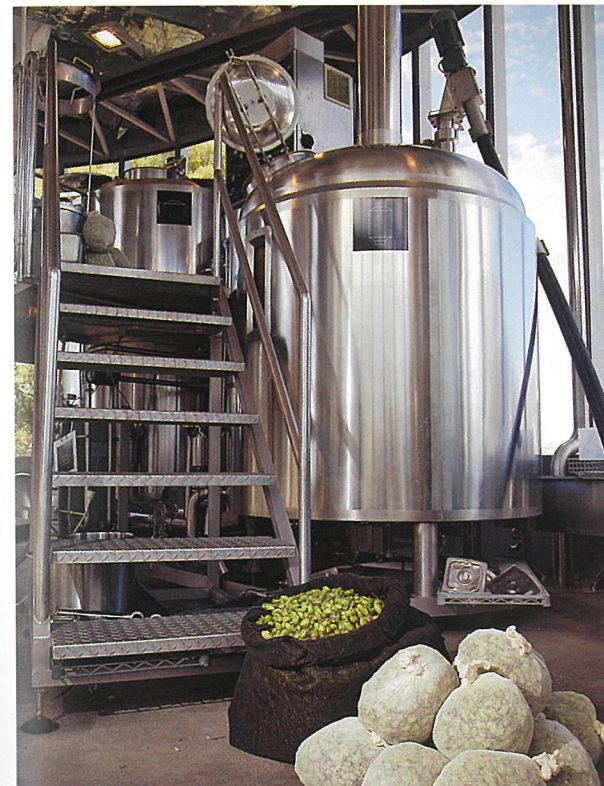
David owned a sculpture of three stacked cows by John Kelly and thought it would make a good artwork for the label, so Kelly was asked for permission. Kelly told David the idea was 'trite' and suggested that he commission some new artworks from him instead, which he did. Leigh picks up the story:

John Kelly was having a war with the Australia Council over the corporatisation and branding of art in Australia. The Australia Council had just spent about two hundred grand on a style guide on how to use their logo, and how better branding will somehow improve the art in

Australia. And Kelly thought they were treating art in Australia like a business, like a corporate thing: you need to do this and you can't do that. So he started making art based on that idea. He 'borrowed' Sidney Nolan's Boy and the Moon, which is a famous abstract work, well before its time, and he got the OzCo logo and he butchered it and connected it to this work to create a series of new works.

The three works that Kelly offered Moo Brew were large abstract pieces that fit well with the Moo Brew project. They had a pop-culture feel to them; they referenced Nolan (who was being collected in depth by David and was going to feature strongly at MONA); and the story of the works' creation was very MONA – cheeky, ballsy, unruly, maverick and value-driven. Leigh explains:

BELOW: The brewery at
MONA





First of all he turned their corporate identity into an artwork. Those artworks were for sale. And then by selling [them] to us, a brewery, and allowing the work to be used on a corporate product in the commercial world, he went full circle. And the Australia Council, you know, wouldn't speak to him!

ABOVE: Controversial labels for the new Moo Brew beers

On the Australia Council website, the 'Logos' page explicitly forbids you to 'rearrange the elements of the logo'.¹ Kelly rearranged them all. If you look on the pilsner label (far left), for example, you can see that *The Boy and the Moon* image has been turned into the rear end of a cow, with the Australia Council circle motif used to give it spots and the ears of its kangaroo used to differentiate the hooves. A similar mash-up happens on the other labels, and comes out very clearly despite the small scale. Which is just as well, because Carmichael had serious doubts about the original stacked cow idea.

The labels offered the very first hints of a MONA 'look'. The works are moodily lit against a dark background, and there's no text, no direct sell. The labels aren't telling you to drink the beer or using words to persuade, they merely show you the artworks. This was the lesson learned by Benson & Hedges when cigarette advertising was banned: you don't need all that advertising verbiage. They used the abstract, indirect and surreal photography of Brian Duffy instead.² It wasn't important to even show the product if you could evoke its structure of feeling; in fact it was more powerful.³ On the front of the Moo Brew bottle, only the name of the beer type is legible: it's all you need, so it's all you get.

NOT SUITABLE FOR BOGANS

What we might now consider a compelling product design wasn't always appreciated. Back in 2008, this Moo Brew branding was very nearly scrapped. The Moorilla business managers had hired some marketing people at around the same time that Leigh came on board, though David had already more or less decided everything – the name of the beer, Moo Brew; the shape of the bottle; and the label artwork. According to Leigh, the new marketing staff steadfastly opposed all three decisions, saying that the name carried the association of milk, not beer; that the bottle shape was associated with champagne, and women rather than men; and the art would appeal to the 'wrong' sort of men ('proper beer-drinkers don't do conceptual art').

To Leigh and David, the entire concept was ironic and cool, and they were aware of a different kind of person who was then drinking new-style beers. However, their advisers envisaged a disaster in the making and wanted to play it safe. They were so confident David would eventually see reason that they arranged for 'normal' bottles to be acquired without his knowledge.

Walsh hadn't imagined himself marketing the beer to the standard Australian bloke – he was looking to sell it as the most expensive beer

brand on the market to people for whom art and a newly designed bottle might have cultural appeal. With this in mind, Leigh came up with the slogan, 'Not suitable for bogans'. To me, this is the first recognisable instance of one of MONA's characteristic voices, but it fell on deaf ears with the marketing people. Leigh recalls:

I came up with that, but once again it caused a shit fight internally. It didn't even get to David. That was one thing that I didn't work on with him, but the marketers stuck it up on their wall and then apparently David walked in about six months later and saw it . . . and said, 'That's fucking perfect, we're doing that.' And they were like, 'Yeah . . .' So they were quite embarrassed. So they came back and said, 'David likes your slogan . . . it looks like we're going on with it.' That's how that one worked. It was that reverse psychology thing: we decided that no one really thinks they're a bogan, so it really wasn't going to offend anyone.

It was silly, but funny and clever, the perfect kind of beer joke for the people they wanted to sell beer to. It played not on who they were or where they came from, but on what they *aspired* to be. Which was to be different. And drink better beer.

In the end, Walsh held his nerve and ignored his marketing advisers. And Moo Brew was a runaway success straight out of the traps (taps?) in 2006, with all three beers winning awards at the 2006 Australian Beer Awards and the wheat beer winning Best Australian Wheat Beer. Leigh Carmichael picked up Best Packaging Award at the Australian International Beer Awards that year, beating over 200 other new beer labels from around the world.

Moo Brew thereafter ran at full capacity, selling out every year. In 2011, it invested in a new plant that would double its output to in excess of 160000 litres a year. It's still sold from champagne bottles (and kegs) and it still costs more than the average beer. It was an important part of the mainstreaming of craft beer, at least for the younger generation.

The commercial success of Moo Brew changed David Walsh too, and prepared him for the bigger task of designing and launching MONA



ABOVE: Not suitable for bogans. This was the perfect catchphrase for Moo Brew, and it appeared on t-shirts, ashtrays, bottles and packaging – all of which are now highly collectable

– or at least, the people I spoke to who were close to him thought so. The Moo Brew story is something of a MONA story writ small. David wanted to create something new, and found himself challenging the way things were done, the established social norms and entrenched patterns of taste. Even though he had the financial clout to make things happen, he didn't want to become a laughing-stock, so it *was* a risk.

Moo Brew's success also consolidated Carmichael and Walsh as a partnership that would be significant in the creative genesis of MONA. David had been the source of most of the core cre-

ative ideas and even the structure of his projects, but he needed to be able to communicate them in a particularly winning way *precisely* because he was seeking to distinguish new ideas from all the others on the shelf. Carmichael, and later Elizabeth Pearce, would create that communication.

Soon after the Moo Brew branding, David showed Leigh his plans for MONA and asked if he was interested in working on it. Leigh couldn't wait for the new challenge – after all, his alternative was to continue working in conventional marketing and the world of conventional taste. It was the chance of a lifetime. Their brand objective, as they came to define it, was 'to position MONA at the forefront of contemporary cultural experience, attract visitors nationally and internationally, engender curiosity, be accessible and thought provoking'. It was quite a leap from a beer brand to MONA; but both had integrity, both were heady.



REAWAKENING DIONYSUS

A year after Moo Brew was launched, David wanted to relaunch Moorilla wines. Leigh was on the case to design the wine labels. It was felt that the Moo Brew experimental approach could work for the wines, too: linking them to art and the mysterious new museum to come. In thinking about the new wine labels, Leigh began to think about the entire branding task – not just Moorilla, but how the brand was going to relate to MONA.

Multiple businesses were operating at Moorilla and needed to be streamlined. Leigh aimed to divide them into two main entities:

One should be this international contemporary art brand, which would be MONA. And then we'll have Moorilla, and Moorilla will stay the site brand and it will reference the Aboriginal heritage of the site. We'd use Australian colours, you know, we'd reference The Source [John Olsen's ceiling installation artwork] in a big way, we'd get John Olsen to maybe do some sort of Moorilla-type thing. So we'd have these two complementary brands: one would be very Australian, and one would be international.

David Walsh wasn't on board. Leigh remembers David telling him, 'Look, I didn't really like your ideas before I read your document, and since I got your document, now I really fucking hate them.'

He said I didn't understand what I was branding, didn't understand the product, and that this had nothing to do with where we were headed. And in that meeting, he scribbled a note about what The Source means, or what The Source means to him. And you know, he was basically saying I didn't even understand the painting either.

These were really early days in the making of MONA, when there was no clear sense of what kind of museum project MONA would be exactly, or how it related to other aspects of the estate. It was 2007, an unsettling year for the newly assembled curating team, but a year when things were clarified considerably by a bunch of talented,

RIGHT: David's note to Leigh Carmichael on the meaning of John Olsen's *The Source*

The Source connotes both the sun in the Australian environment and its connection to Moorilla products and its use as a repository for the viewing of landscape, and also the ovum and sperm, with its connection to Bacchus (Dionysus) and ~~the~~ orgiastic ritual consumption of wine. The link to the museum is obvious.

opinionated people talking them through.

At that stage they thought they'd open in January 2009. However, David needed to be a lot more forthcoming about what he wanted MONA to be – in the end, Adrian Spinks, the exhibition designer, and Mark Fraser, the museum director, had to press him into explaining that systematically through a brief. That process would have been a lot harder had David not already run into problems communicating his ideas to Leigh when he was trying to identify brand MONA. In this way the branding process worked to define MONA, rather than the other way around. Leigh may have taken David by surprise by realising that in order to rebrand Moorilla wines, he needed to know the relationship between Moorilla and MONA. David was very creative and intellectually driven, while Leigh was a systematic, clear-thinking communicator in both words and images. They shared a common aesthetic and culture, so there was sufficient common ground for them to connect, but operationalising that connection was awkward. Leigh,

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Last Riot 2* (2007) AES+F

after all, was newly employed and junior, and David was all-powerful, yet distracted by many other things and inexperienced as a project manager.

It should have been David who resolved their impasse by taking Leigh through his vision and ideas more thoroughly but, as it happened, Leigh took the initiative. Generally speaking, David is the source of creative ideas and final decisions at MONA, but the people he works with typically have the freedom to suggest initiatives and develop ideas of their own too. Results are, in this way, collaborations that are fulfilling to all involved. It is disconcerting of course to be that free but it is intoxicating too, when it goes well.

Leigh had tried and failed to make sense of David's somewhat cryptic scribbled statement with its biting closing phrase, that its connection and relevance to the branding of MONA 'was obvious'. Leigh began to read Greek mythology, but it still wasn't obvious to him. He began to feel insecure and to think the Moo Brew success had more or less been handed to him on a plate:

So I went to him and said, 'All right, you've told me I don't understand what I'm doing, but you've never told me what we are doing, so what are we doing?' And he emailed a statement back to me . . . I went, 'Okay, this is clearly not just about grabbing an image and wrapping it round like wallpaper, it needs depth.'

David's email read:

MONA and Moorilla proffer art, architecture, food, wine and music – all chosen or made with passionate commitment, and informed by a deep attachment to the principles of humanism – with the purpose of providing an experience of sufficient emotional and intellectual engagement to make a permanent impression on the mindscape.

The brand was not about finding apt representational metaphors for



ABOVE: Moorilla Winter Wines

David's products – wine, beer and art – but about communicating the objectives behind the new ways of presenting and consuming them that Moorilla (and soon MONA) would offer. Leigh and David had to identify overarching values behind *everything* at Moorilla, rather than identifying two entities to be branded separately.

Walsh had loaned Carmichael a large pile of books on the Greek god Dionysus (known as Bacchus by the Romans) and Leigh began to see how they connected beautifully with a museum dedicated to the themes of sex and death located in a vineyard (plus brewery). It was something that people could intuitively identify with. As the god associated with freedom from restraint, disorder, ecstasy and wine, Dionysus was associated with anyone who experimented with greater freedoms, the pleasures of the body and the subversion of civilised restraint, inhibition and sobriety. This included anyone who railed against one-dimensional modern life and its excessive focus on work and self-improvement via 'approved' forms of leisure (one being the conventional didactic museum).⁴

In our era, this 'cult' of Dionysus had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century and a progressively bolder presence in the first half of the twentieth century. Nietzsche famously likened this Dionysian impulse to the search for freedom and escape from an Apollonian modern order that had preached rationality, discipline and self-restraint. But it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the cult of Dionysus was properly reawakened.⁵ Since the 1960s, the body has increasingly been seen as a natural and normal site of pleasure. Dancing, drugs, drinking, sex, exercise, vacations, sensuous explorations, comfort, partying and festivals have all been liberalised. ('Liber', which is the root of the word 'liberalise', is in fact another Roman name for Dionysus.) There are new forms of unrestrained and hybridised pleasure, body modifications, tattoos, cyborg prostheses and sex changes; a body may now be viewed as a 'work-in-progress' rather than as naturally or even culturally 'given'. Taboos of all kinds have been questioned, including disease, abnormality, death, torture, ugliness, body discharges and ageing. Essentially, the body has become a renewed and contested site of experimentation, discovery, openness and change.



These new freedoms and values have been shared very broadly among the mass-educated generations from the baby boomers down. But they remain continually under attack from religious revivals, conservative backlashes and the neoliberal order.⁶ A Bill Henson photography exhibition can still be closed down by police and face very public censure from an Australian prime minister.

In ancient Greece, Dionysus was the outsider god: a foreigner from beyond the borders of civilisation, the protector of those who did not belong to conventional society, the god who embodied tolerance. Born of a god (Zeus) and a human mother (Semele), he was himself a hybrid, a subversive saviour figure whose wild ways and medium of theatre, dance and party would offer liberation to people from the oppressiveness of civilisation. In his modern iteration, Dionysus would be experimental and intellectually tolerant, and his orgiastic parties might encompass ecstatic dance, sex, music or theatre and festivities of the mind. Think of SXSW in Austin, Texas, or the Festival of Dangerous Ideas in Sydney – events when mind and body are inextricably intertwined rather than partitioned. In many ways, the ‘reawakening of Dionysus’ since the twentieth century has been about healing this separation between body and mind.

These are the kinds of connections Walsh was beginning to fashion into an approach for his new museum – and through Leigh Carmichael into a brand, to capture that approach visually without needing to spell it out.

Leigh began with the Moorilla labels. He collected some contemporary references to Dionysus, such as Cy Twombly’s *Bacchus* series and the photography of Bill Henson, gave them to the dance group BalletLab as inspiration, and commissioned them to create a work, which he filmed and photographed. Pictures of the naked dancers became Moorilla’s new wine labels, their Dionysian imagery embodying the paradox of wine as a source of pleasure and pain, ecstasy and agony. While the ballet photography gave the images a respectable edge, they were very obviously different from the labels of other wines.

To launch the new labels, around 200 people were invited out to Moorilla, wine trade people as well as A-listers. They were sent very smart invitations but little else.

PREVIOUS PAGE: In trying to capture the Dionysian spirit of Moorilla, MONA’s creative director Leigh Carmichael commissioned a new work from BalletLab in 2007, which he photographed to use as labels



ABOVE: Moorilla Muse Chardonnay 2010 with the BalletLab label

When they arrived, BalletLab performed a thirty-minute Dionysian orgy-like contemporary dance work in almost complete darkness. I’ve seen a recording of this – it’s astonishing, truly breathtaking. At the end, the crowd stood in stunned silence for a few minutes before breaking into massive applause.

The enthusiastic reception was a relief for Leigh and David. They’d stuck their necks out and gone it alone again against the balance of opinion at Moorilla, just as they had with the Moo Brew branding. Leigh told me:

I got very little support from anyone other than David, for most of this. Some said, ‘It’s going to be the end of [the] Moorilla name, we’re going to ruin the brand, we’ll never recover, sales will plummet, and it’s too early.’ It was really hard. It really took an emotional toll getting this stuff through.

However, the Moorilla labels weren’t the main battle as Leigh saw it. He needed to get his colleagues away from the idea that his main role as designer was to come up with a logo, and instead help them to see that he had to mantle MONA with a brand that showed its cultural and emotional orientation to the world.

A brand is a living thing, it changes over time, it moves, it’s not a logo. It’s just a thing that, you know, when you think about something it’s the images that you have in your head about it, or an understanding – your reputation.

With two success stories notched up that had created exactly the kind of impact they wanted among the public, the internal disquiet was less strident and David and Leigh’s confidence had grown. They were ready to have a crack at branding MONA itself.

The trouble was, the museum was actually three years away from opening. Underneath them, an enormous building was taking shape. Walsh was going large.