

INSPIRE

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Fantasy has no limits for the Campana brothers • Think inside and outside the luxury box

LUXURY PACKS a PUNCH

Packaging luxury is an art form, and one that Italy-based package producer Cartografica Pusterla takes very seriously.

*G*ive us the luxuries of life, and we will dispense with its necessities," sighed writer Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1858.

Luxury – what the dictionary calls “an indulgence in something that provides pleasure, satisfaction, or ease” – is a necessity for many of us today. And part of the pleasure, satisfaction and ease of that luxury lies in how it is packaged.

The trademark Tiffany blue box is one of the best-known illustrations of the relationship between the package and the product it contains. The box not only protects the jewelry within, but it also enriches the item, and the recipient's experience is enhanced by the interplay between the two.

With luxury cosmetics, the outside container is secondary packaging. The box protects the bottle of perfume or jar of skin crème that actually holds the product. The more upscale the product, the more likely it will include secondary packaging.

Cartografica Pusterla, based in Italy, is one of Europe's leading producers of luxury secondary packaging for the cosmetics industry, with turnover last year of more than 16.2 million euros for 60 million folding boxes and 3.7 million covered boxes.

The company's flights of fancy include real silk bonded onto a perfume package for Ferré and an unusual hexagon container for a Christmas set by Issey Miyake, including a

magnet closure and plastic moulds inside to cradle the three bottles in the set.

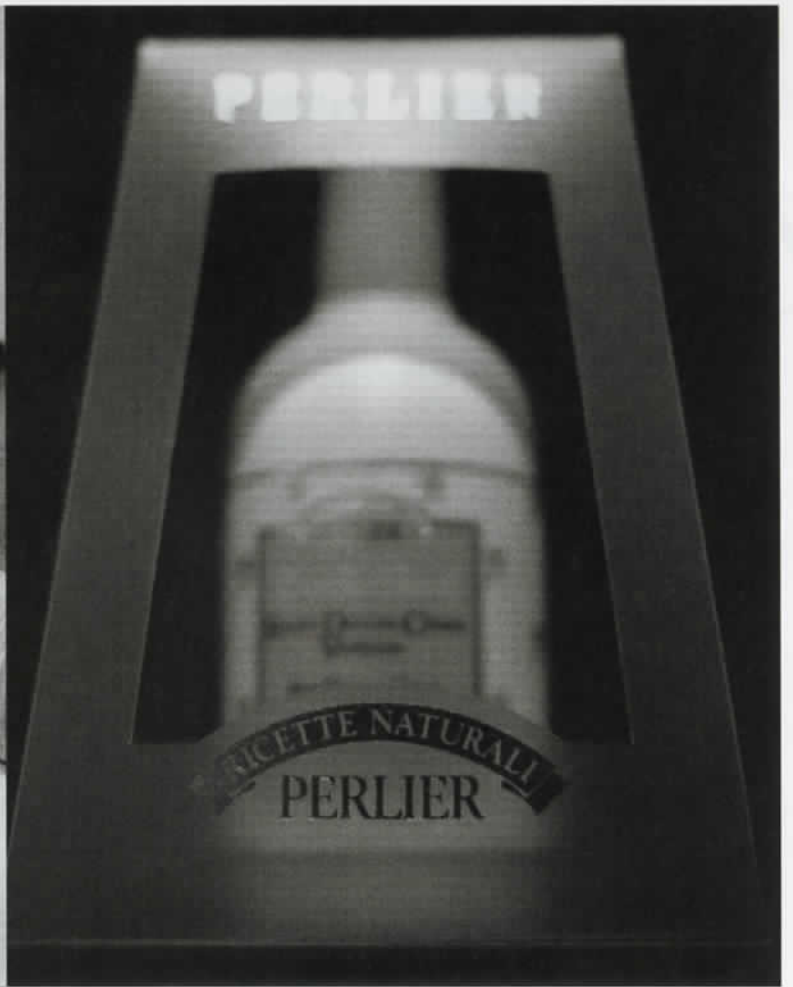
Giuseppe Meana, the third-generation managing director of Pusterla, defines luxury as “what gives you more,” always with reference to the specific designer or brand. “There has to be research in coherence,” he says. “The clearest ideas come from the most successful brands.”

So luxury expresses itself differently in different companies. Luxury cosmetic packaging for Versace includes strong primary colours and an androgynous element. Roberto Cavalli is similarly androgynous, but the colours are more muted. Giorgio Armani is minimalist and pure.

A similar process

The process of developing a new package tends to be similar from company to company: Once they decide on a new line, clients tend to go first to a favourite guru or specialist in cosmetics packaging design, and then they come to Pusterla with a mock-up. Sometimes they go to Pusterla directly.

“They ask us, ‘What techniques are needed to make this package? What printing processes? What costs?’ They tell us the form and model they want, i.e., top opening, side opening, window or special feature. They tell us the colour they want. They provide the graphics and price guidelines. Then we try to achieve it,” explains Meana.



Nobility breeds luxury

Cartografica Pusterla, a leading name in luxury packaging for the cosmetics industry, was founded in 1880 by an Italian noble named Pusterla in Venegono Inferiore, a small town north of Milan. Needing to make ends meet, he began making box containers for the many pharmaceutical companies in Milan.

He died in 1922 without heirs, leaving the company to its employees. But there was no direction and no money for investment. A local banker turned to one of his clients, asking if the latter would be interested in taking over. The new owner was the grandfather of Giuseppe Meana, Pusterla's current CEO.

Meana's grandfather was less interested in pharmaceutical packaging than in the company's printing ability. He used the facility to print customer bills for his primary business – selling utilities. However, in 1964 electricity in Italy was nationalised. Pusterla needed a new source of business.

By this time Meana's uncle was running the company. Married to a pharmacist, he began investing in new equipment for pharmaceutical packaging.

Giuseppe Meana entered the business in 1973 when his uncle died. When he took over, the business was still largely boxes for pharmaceutical companies, and cosmetics in Italy were being produced by these companies.

"Cosmetics packaging was more fascinating to me than packaging for pharmaceuticals. It had more form and colour and fantasy," he recalls. "So I began moving the company in this direction. It wasn't a planned strategy; it reflected my personal interest."

What began as a noble's experiment has become an expression of nobility in packaging.



Giuseppe Meana entered Pusterla in 1973. Today the Italian company has expanded to France: "I speak French, so it was natural to grow the market in France, which happens to be the world's most important market for luxury cosmetics."

Pusterla makes two kinds of boxes: folded and covered (or wrapped). Folded boxes are delivered flat to the client and represent 60 percent of sales. The minimum order is 10,000. The more expensive wrapped boxes account for 40 percent of sales and require a minimum order of 2,500.

Pusterla may do 10 or 20 different mock-ups before the client makes a final decision. Therefore it is important to be close to the client. Meana says, "You have to understand their business as well as have technical competence."

A foot in France

Because France is the world leader in luxury cosmetics, Pusterla bought Coffrets Creation, a French facility, in 1999 to be closer to its customers. Coffrets Creation produces a third of the company's output, but half of Pusterla's total sales goes to France. Another 40 percent goes to Italy, and the remaining 10 percent to Germany and Switzerland.

In addition to its relationship with customers, Pusterla works to maintain an excellent relationship with its suppliers, such as Iggesund Paperboard. Meana brings clients to visit Iggesund every year so they will understand how paperboard is made, its potential and its limitations.

In his view, paperboard offers many more possibilities than plastic does. "Plastic is okay as a product container, or as sleeves, for example, but you can be so much more creative with paperboard," he says. "Paperboard is friendlier. It can be coloured more creatively, it can be recycled, and it has more tradition and ties to the past without seeming old."

Keeping paperboard packaging new and fresh requires considerable investment in technology. Pusterla boasts a new CAD design system and a small format print machine – a five-colour offset for small runs and pre-series tests. "Computers have definitely speeded up the process of our work, but you still need the ideas behind the equipment," Meana says. "The human component is extremely important. Our employees are what keep our company competitive." *

Window on favourites

Windows in cosmetics packaging are usually found in mass market products where there is no personal service and the customer has to understand the product unassisted.

Yet Black for Bulgari, a luxury package with two windows, is Gianluca Peron's favourite package project, and – as director of production at Pusterla – he has seen them all. He cites Black

because it made use of different materials, was technically challenging with the two windows, was produced in two versions (more and less expensive), and offered extreme visibility while maintaining extreme elegance.

Giuseppe Meana, managing director of Pusterla, also names Black as his favourite package. He surmises that the company's French affiliate would probably cite a champagne holder for Veuve Clicquot, a sleek package with an alligator-like aperture. Its technical problems alone took almost a year to resolve.



Future trends

According to Giuseppe Meana, the trends now emerging in the luxury sector of cosmetics packaging include:

1. A return to opacity. The past three years have been characterised by metallics, and now Meana sees a growing demand for natural tints and subtle colours. Metallic won't disappear, but the trend is in the other direction, he says.
2. A move to vertical packaging rather than horizontal.
3. The use of new inks. For example, the iridescent orange ink printed on a Marbert sun product would not have been possible a few years ago.
4. The use of new technologies, such as laser imagery. The technology that made possible a light-reflecting box for Venus face crème has been available for only the past four or five years. "That box is expensive for a mass market crème, but it makes the product stand out on the supermarket shelf. The client has already come back to us for additional reprints," notes Meana.

Learning the ABC of design

Designer Thierry de Baschmakoff founded the Aesthete agency in Paris in 1984, specialising in design for luxury items. He knows the ABCs of high-end brands such as Aubusson, Bulgari and Cartier, among others.

What are the criteria for luxury packaging? Does it start with the brand identity?

The product comes first. For me it is definitely the most valuable and the most important consideration. A brand is a constellation of products, and a brand develops from know-how around a product category. Today's brands are more elaborated, due to advertising and marketing needs.

What is trendy at the moment: creative packaging solutions or the use of varnishes, foils etc?

The real trend these days is a melting pot of many things. "Find your way and create your own trend" should be the rule. Today, graphic design is influenced by a lot of new considerations, such as Web design and fashion magazines. Luxury packaging is at a particular moment where it has to redefine what makes something a luxury product; otherwise it will be indistinguishable from other products.

How are new techniques developed?

There are many ways. Sometimes by chance, you are working on a specific subject and you hit upon a new application. You can also use one kind of technology with another one. Today I would say that the best way to develop new techniques is for manufacturer and designer to work

together. New techniques are the results of an aesthetic aim in the context of a specific application.

What will luxury packages look like in the future?

Certainly not like what we have today. I think that a luxury package should not be disposable. Starting with that premise, many things can change.

Who decides the new trends?

It's less important to know *who* decides the trends as opposed to *what* is exactly right at the right moment. The answer to your question is that creative hands decide the new trends, but with luxury items it is even more complicated: it's balancing know-how, creativity and cleverness.