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Winning Back Joe Corkscrew

BY DAVID KILEY

BEFORE THERE WAS YELLOW Tail, the ubiquitous

bels, and wielding new distribution muscle through an alliance with Constellation Brands Inc. It also hopes to



March of the Pinots

Lately it seems as if wine is going to the dogs—not to mention the monkeys, penguins, and kangaroos. Almost 20% of wines introduced in the past three years feature animals on their labels, according to ACNielsen. With names like Little Penguin, Monkey Bay, and Funky Llama, “critter brands” outsell noncritter counterparts 2 to 1, ACNielsen says. The trend started in 2001 with Australia’s Yellow Tail, featuring a wallaby, which quickly hopped to the top U.S. import spot. A recent addition is French rabbit, a line with eco-friendly packaging.

—Amy Cortese

been attracted to fruitier and better-marketed wines from Australia and South America. And retailers, for a brief time, cooled to featuring overtly French wines, considering the wave of anti-Gallic feeling that began in 2003 when France opposed the Iraq war. Rothschild sold only 2.9 million bottles in the U.S. in 2004, less than half its 6.5 million high in 1992, according to the annual study by wine and spirits research journal *Impact*.

Now the house of Rothschild is trying to reclaim its place in America as a trusted, sophisticated budget brand. It’s designing blends that taste more like Napa and Aussie wines, recasting its la-

starts lately more successful than Bordeaux, he is talking about such onerous notions as screwcaps and wine boxes. “France remains a reference for the world. But when it comes to marketing and packaging, we need to clean up our act,” concedes Eizaguirre.

The attempt at restoration, fittingly, began with the wine, starting with the 2003 vintage. Priced at \$6 to \$8, Mouton Cadet rouge went from an oak-finished cabernet sauvignon-dominant wine to one that’s unoaked and 65% merlot. The result is a fruitier, less tannic wine created in direct response to Australian and Spanish reds. The white wine



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN WEBSTER