

# Etiquel strengthens leadership in wine labels through partnership with Cartes

Leading Portuguese wine converter makes unique products with six GT360 and Gemini lines, and is set to introduce Jet D-Screen and laser die-cutting. Written by Mr Lorenzo Villa

Etiquel was founded in 1982 in Alfena, Portugal, on the edge of the flourishing textile district north of Porto. The business was founded by Francisco da Rocha Ferreira, who, together with five collaborators, started the production of fabric labels for garments. In the mid-1990s, the crisis in the textile industry, with the subsequent relocation of production to the East, dealt a severe blow to the company, forcing a rethink of the business model. In 2000, Celestino Ferreira da Costa, Francisco's eldest son, joined the company, and together with his father, he realized the potential of the wine label market.

Etiquel purchased its first webfed press and from simple water and glue labels it soon moved on to self-adhesive labels, increasing the complexity of its jobs. In the following years, thanks to the growing reputation of Portuguese wines worldwide, the demand for high-end labels on premium papers snowballed, requiring the introduction of offset printing technology and the first off-line converting units. Over the last decade, Etiquel has focused its offerings on the wine sector, establishing itself as the largest producer of wine labels in Portugal and winning numerous awards.

With more than 100 employees and a turnover of EUR 12 million (2022), the company is still led by Celestino Costa. To cope with growing volumes, increasingly shorter delivery times, and a demanding clientele, Etiquel has installed six Cartes embellishment lines since 2014, making them the beating heart of its production.

## Luxury label specialists equipped for high volumes and just-in-time orders

Two decades of investment in research, development, and testing of the most suitable techniques and materials for wine labels have led Etiquel to serve the most prestigious wineries in Portugal. Although the converter uses a variety of coated papers and plastic films, 70% of the jobs are done on premium papers with virgin, embossed, felted, pearlescent, soft-touch, embossed, and metallized finishes. Etiquel uses Miyakoshi semi-rotary offset presses in its printing department and an HP Indigo 6900 digital press for just-in-time productions and variable designs. Almost all labels are finished with selective varnishing, screen printing effects, embossing, and hot stamping.

"Offering an out-of-the-ordinary product and interpreting the customer's idea beyond their expectations allows us to stay one step ahead of our competitors," Costa explains. "But we must do this at market prices, meeting tight deadlines and efficiently supplying small and large batches."



Until 2011, Etiquel produced its labels by combining several off-line machines: a setup that required many operators and took the toll of downtime and material waste imposed by numerous makereadies. Decreasing batch sizes and the need to manage frequent reorders made the company's production layout less and less efficient, prompting the owners to invest in an integrated line.

## Ten years of partnership and six Cartes lines installed

Since the early 2000s, Francisco and Celestino Costa have regularly visited Labelexpo, drupa, and other trade fairs, where they were fascinated by the solutions developed by Cartes, which were, however, too sophisticated and expensive for a still small and fragile company. Nevertheless, the two companies created a human and professional understanding, which in 2013 resulted in an actual negotiation.

"To better serve our customers and grow, we needed to increase productivity and to do that, we needed a reliable supplier and uncompromising technology," Costa recounts. "Cartes had been our dream for years. Therefore, we decided it was time to invest."

The Etiquel team visited Cartes' production facility and opted for a GT360 line with two hot stamping units and a screen printing unit. This proved to be a winning choice, so much so that over the next five years, the company ordered three more lines, which followed the same configuration, with a few variations needed to produce specific products. While all the machines are, in fact, capable of varnishing, embossing, and semi-rotary die-cutting, some configurations alternate several screen printing units with hot stamping units.



In 2018, Etiquel also purchased a Gemini line equipped with flexo units and semi-rotary die-cutting to support digital printing converting needs. Last, only in order of time, is the fifth GT360 line, installed in 2023.

## The reasons for Cartes' choice

The decision to purchase several finishing lines of the same type and format, configured with similar stations, translates into multiple advantages for Etiquel. First, the label printer can carry out several sequential processes - such as applying screen printing effects on different layers of foil - in a single pass. In addition, having twin lines is a formidable backup during peak periods or scheduled maintenance.

"Having several machines in the same family allows us to split a job over several lines and complete it faster, or to produce several variants for the same customer, or even to handle several jobs for several customers simultaneously," Costa explains. "All our operators can start and operate Cartes lines and are interchangeable between equipment."

The GT360's modularity allows Etiquel to diversify its offering with unique labels, which competitors cannot achieve at a sustainable cost. In addition, the converter appreciates the robustness, precision, and the reliability of the Cartes technology over time, enabling multi-shift operation with no downtime, reduced maintenance, and less material waste. All these features translate into higher margins. Finally, thanks to their ease of use, the Cartes lines do not require skilled operators.



## A deep, long-lasting relationship

The relationship between Etiquel and Cartes goes beyond the goodness of the technology and the satisfaction of excellent service. Both companies' ownership, technical and sales teams have been working closely together for years to test and develop innovative production methods and to make it possible to produce ever more complex and valuable labels.

"Many customers buy the same type of label for years, but when they ask us for something new, we must be ready to surprise them," Costa says. "That's when the partnership with Cartes comes into play and almost always wins us the job."

The ongoing consolidation in the market and the increasing pressure on prices, service levels, and product innovation represent a crucial challenge for Etiquel, which is preparing to invest in new printing and finishing machines, both analog and digital. Company's ownership is aware that mergers and acquisitions will be an unavoidable topic in the coming years, and having state-of-the-art technology will be one way to govern this process. With this in mind, in 2024, Etiquel will complement its fleet of Cartes machines with the Jet D-Screen digital embellishment system and a Gemini laser die-cutting line.

"I don't see Etiquel's future without Cartes, with which we share ethical principles of continuous improvement, credibility, trust, and sustainability," Costa concludes. "Working together is the only way to continue to be the first option for our customers."

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