An update – making your own bottle labels for your home-brew beer

I did a post a few months back about making labels for your home-brew and recently it seems to be the most read post on our blog and I've noticed it being passed around on some of the brewing forums for folk who are asking for advice on making their own labels. Since I wrote the original I've made a whole heap of new labels so I thought it might be time for a quick update on what I'm doing and maybe some more hints and tips that I didn't post last time. The blog post I did is still available if you want to have a look –

- http://www.elidonald.co.uk/blog/making-your-own-labels-and-pump-clips-for-your-home-made-beer/

If you hadn't read it previously I'd say go read that post and come back as there is some useful information there that will set you up to get started.

You read it? Good then lets look at some new labels and how I did them.

My labels – how did I choose that design?

I actually didn't start off with that design for my bottles. I've gone through a whole process of trying out different labels until I found the one that got me most

excited and although at the minute I am really pleased with them, they are not perfect but I'll tell you more about that later.

My first label idea was based on the Brewdog labels. I liked the bold colours and text of the design and I liked the slightly grungy look so I had a play about with how I could recreate that kind of idea.

My first attempt was for a coopers lager kit I did, so of course thinking of Australian lager, I made the label yellow. Looking back, it's not a brilliant label not least because of the poor choice of yellow background with white lettering which wasn't easy to read. Also it was a bit cluttered. I tried to put a name for the beer, details about what it looked and tasted like, the style, the percentage, a logo for my "brewery" and some information about pouring it since it had yeast in the bottle. An awful lot of info to get onto a little square of paper. Things did continue to evolve though.

I switched colours mostly, so each beer had the same label but with the background as a different colour. Red for Goblin Queen, Purple for Heather Ale etc. But I mostly stuck with this design, just adding a couple of little bits to grunge it up a bit and it worked fine for a while, all our beers had this label on them and together they looked quite cool sitting on a shelf and I was pretty proud.

However the grunginess and the massive amounts of text started to annoy me and I wanted something simple and bold. Something modern. So I scrapped it all and started with a blank, white square and said, "What text actually NEEDS to be there?" And the scary thing is, not as much as you think.

So I went for a very stripped down version, just a square of bold colour and the text I needed in a plain bold font. It worked out great and I am still using this idea although tweaked ever so slightly.

So how do I make the labels?

Ok, I normally use a piece of software called Fireworks to

make my labels but since there are lots of free versions of graphics software out there, I'm going to show you how I would create a simple version of this label using one of the pieces of software you can get for free.
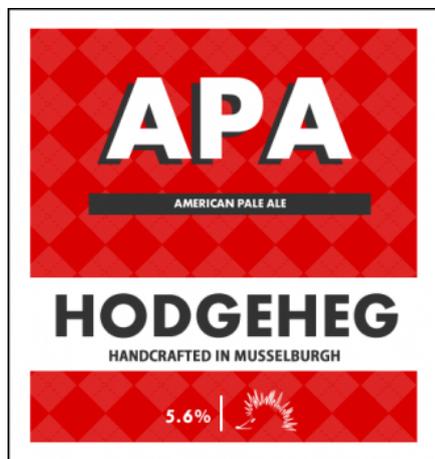
First download a piece of software called GIMP from this webpage and install it. http://www.gimp.org/

Creating your label

step 1- get started

ok once you have GIMP open on your computer you need to create a new work area. Simply done, click FILE and then NEW. This gives you a choice of sizes to play with. For this label I usually make it around 500 pixel each length so I choose the template from the drop box which nearest fits this size – 640 by 480.
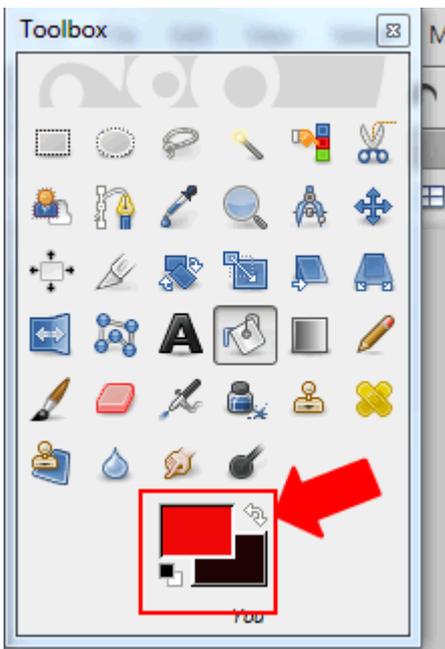
step 2 – draw your label outline

Click on the rectangle tool on the tool box.
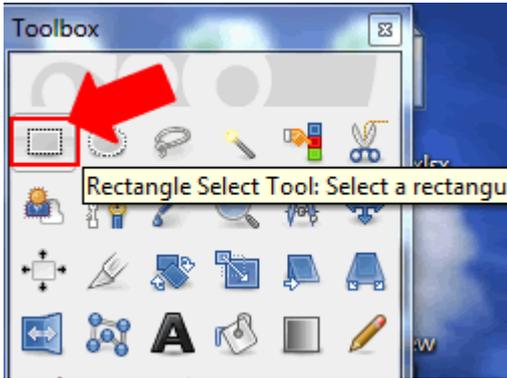
Then drag the rectangle shape to the rough size you want.

To colour the rectangle, double click on the colour box and then choose the colour you want from the pop up window.


Now to fill your rectangle with the colour you have chosen, click on the fill tool and then on your rectangle. I chose white but you can choose any colour you like.
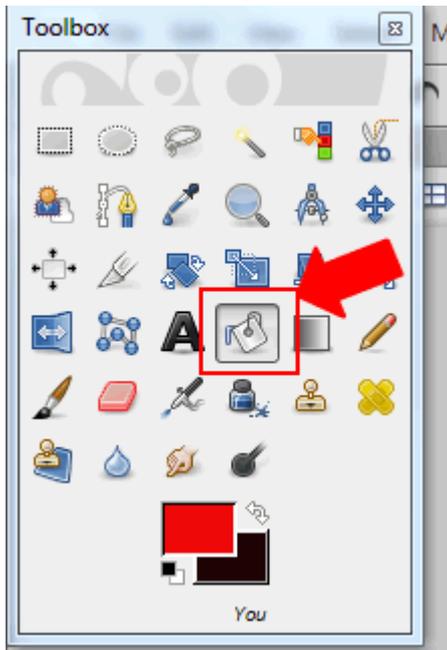
The next thing we want to do is to create the black outline around the rectangle. To do this we have to choose the background colour. On the graphic above you can see the colour boxes are red and black, red is the foreground colour and black is the background colour. You can either change the foreground colour (as you did previously) or you can switch them around by clicking the little white arrows on the top right of the colour boxes.

However you do it, for this example we want to give our rectangle a black outline so make your colour black.

Then using the menus at the top of the screen, click on EDIT, then STROKE SELECTION. It will now open the window where you can edit the outline.
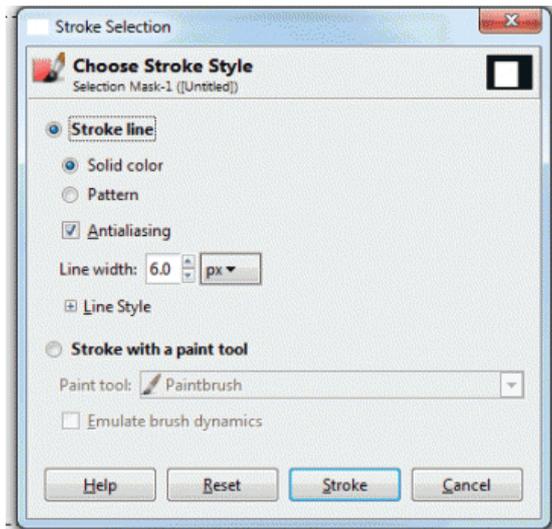
For this example I am going to change my stroke settings to have a solid line and a line width of 1 px then click STROKE.

step 3 – draw your centre rectangles

You should now have a white rectangle with a black outline on the screen. The next thing we are going to do is add another rectangle in the middle of the first and colour it red. We do this in exactly the same way as before. Click on the rectangle tool, draw your rectangle and then use the colour picker and fill tool to colour it, in this instance red.
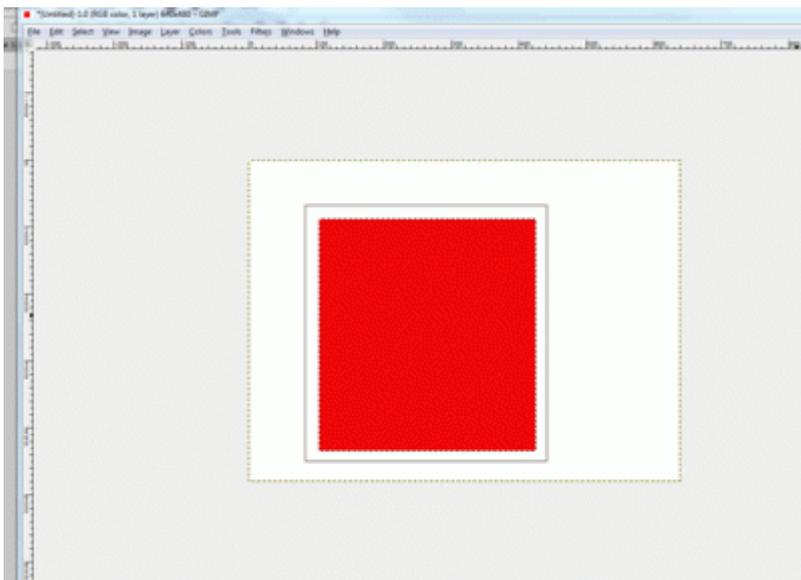

Now you are rocking!

Right next we are going to add the white band where you put the name of your brewery. Exactly the same as before choose the rectangle tool, then draw it out where you want it and then use the colour tool and fill tool to colour it white.

step 4 — adding text

Now we have the basic shapes in place, we are going to add the text. Firstly the name of the beer. in the example I am calling my beer APA, for American Pale Ale.

From the toolbox, click on the bold A in the centre, this is your text tool.
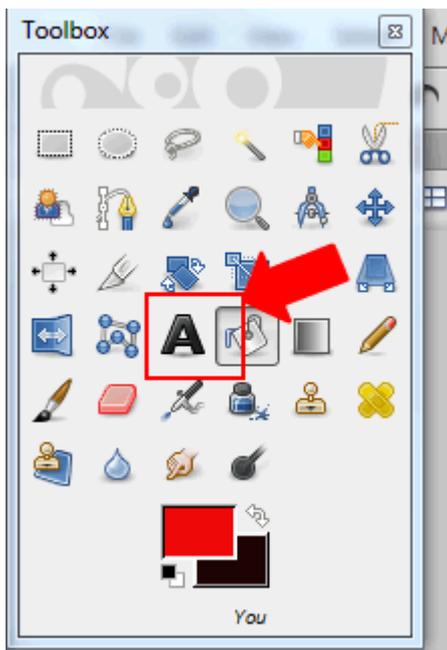
As you did for your rectangles, draw out the area you want your text to go. It's good to make it much bigger than you need for the minute, you can always make it smaller later.

Inside the space you have just drawn, double click and then type the text you want. A text tool bar will appear which will allow you to change the size or colour. Get everything as you want it by highlighting the text you just written and then using this bar to make changes.

To adjust the font or the position of the text, you can do this from the tool options on the left.
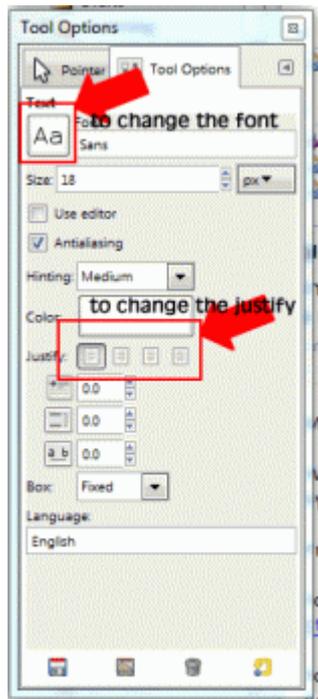
On my example I have text that looks like it has a dark shadow. I made this by having two pieces of text. One white and one black. Then I moved one on top of the other.

To move an item such as text, click on the moving tool from the tool box and then click on the item and drag it to where you want it to be.
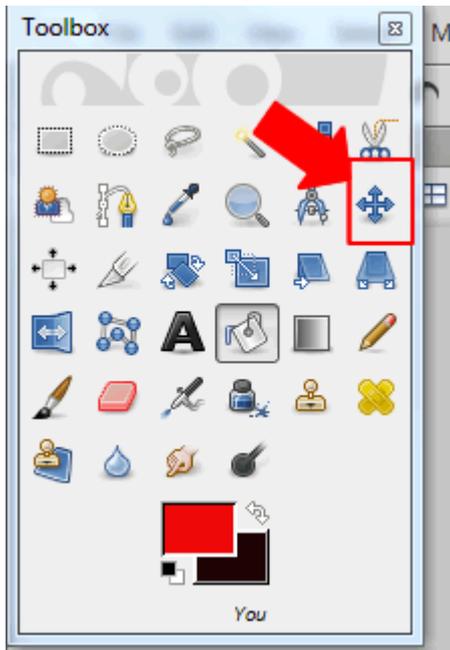
The other tool you need to know about is the layers toolbox. It allows you to move layers to have one on top of the other. In this case the white text on top of the black text.

The layer which you want to be on top, will be top of the list. For example, our white rectangle is the back, then next is the red one, then the black text and then the white text as this is the order we want them to appear.
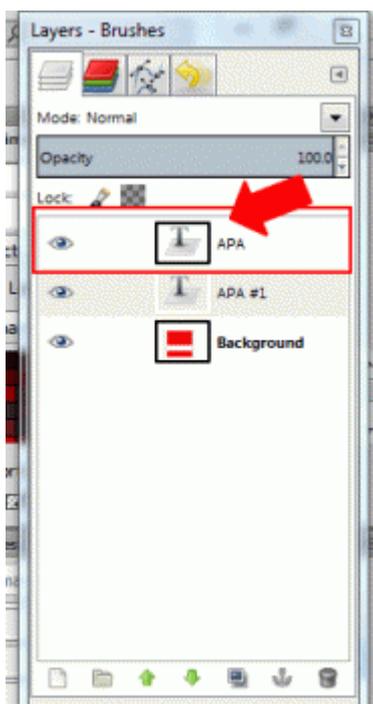
Adjust yours so that your text appears as you want it.

You now use this same set of tools to add your other text elements to your label and in the end you should end up with something similar to this.
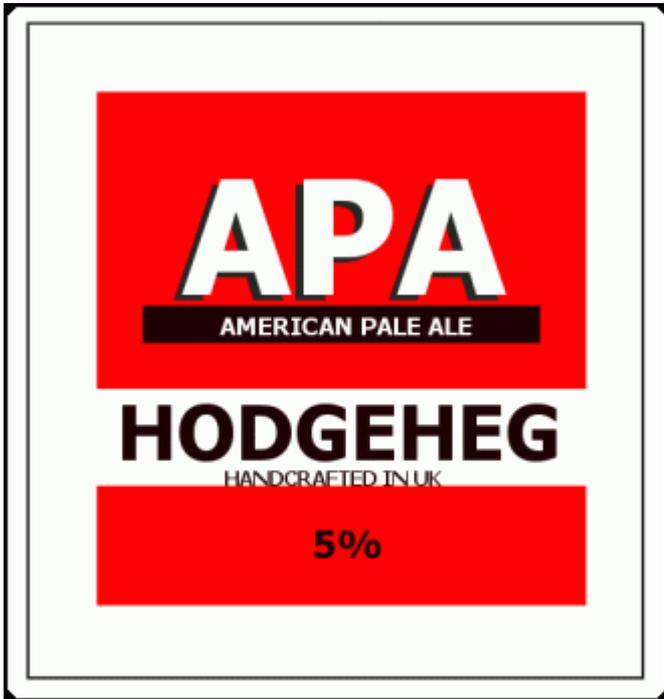
step 5 — saving your graphic

Right, you've created a brilliant label that you are super proud of. Now you want to save it so you can print it and use it on your new beer.

The first thing you want to do is get rid of any of the excess white area (or canvas) around your graphic.

From the menu at the top of the screen, click IMAGE. Then click FIT CANVAS TO SELECTION. this will take out all the excess canvas for you.

Lastly we want to save your creation, so to do this, click FILE and then EXPORT. This will open a window where you can choose the type of file to save and give it a name. I'd recommend using the little cross on the bottom left to choose

SELECT FILE TYPE and then from the list that appears choose GIF.

Now at the top, give your file a name and then click EXPORT.

Springfest — because it's seasonal beer time again

I can't believe it's that time of year already. It comes round so fast but here we are again preparing for Springfest at the weekend. Those of you

who are regular readers to our blog will know that Springfest is our annual celebration of all things sunny and bright, the growth of new things in the garden and the general feeling of fabulousness that comes with the brighter weather. It's a bit like Beltaine for us, Beltaine is the celtic festival of fire. It is the celebration of the winter darkness being defeated by the spring sun and the rebirth of the world around us. That's kinda how we feel.

As is the tradition for Springfest, a beer is brewed for the event using citra hops. Last year Kate designed the beer, this year she has actually brewed the beer [(you can read about her efforts and see the recipe for yourself here)](#) , but more than that, so has Luke and Valerie. This year we are having a wee brewing competition where Kate, Luke and Valerie have all brewed up a wee something they are going to bring along and we'll all taste them and pick a winner.

Kate has made a double IPA using citra hops, Valerie has made an elderflower cider and Luke has made a red ale and aged it with cherry wood. Things should be interesting.

As always when we have one of our seasonal parties there will be food to go with the beer and for the theme this year to mark the first Springfest Homebrewing competition, I've gone with a theme of "boozing tasties" or basically the food you eat when you've drunk a little too much. I know you guys like to get your hands on some of the recipes for our "doos" (scottish for party) so here you go.

So amongst other things we are going to be having;

Indian curry

[the recipe is in one of our early blog posts here.](#)

Malay Chicken

Ingredients for 2 people

- Chicken breast x 2 cubed
- Mushrooms about 7 or 8
- Coconut milk
- Malay Spices (I use [Malay Masala](#)) Obviously you can make your own spice blend but i love this one so have stuck with it.
- Lemon grass
- Coriander (cilantro for our US readers) — chopped roughly
- Red pepper — thinly sliced
- Oyster Sauce
- Garlic
- ground nut oil for frying

Method

1. First thing to do hammer the lemon grass to bruise it.
2. Then add it to a high sided pan with a little oil to fry and add the chicken breast. fry off until almost cooked through then add the garlic and mushrooms and let them cook off for a few minutes.
3. Then add the red pepper slices (as these are thinly

sliced they won't take long to soften).

4. You now have the basic ingredients in the pan, it's time to stat adding layers of flavour. Add 1 table-spoon of your Malay spice mix and give everything a really good stir to get it all coated.Give it 2 or 3 minutes.
5. Now add the can of coconut milk and again get everything combined by giving the pan a good stir.
6. You now have a nice creamy curry and you can stop there if it's to your tastes but I like to add a couple more things which just make it extra yummy. Mix in 2 table spoons of oyster sauce and a handful of chopped coriander leaves.

There you, really easy Malay curry.

I serve it with rice and some fresh coriander sprinkled over the top but it works just as well with noodles and Kate loves flat breads to soak all the sauce up.

The Road To Ruin: the original Hodgeheg seasonal ale

Well it's that time of year again, pumpkin ale time. If you don't remember from last year, we made pumpkin ale for

thanksgiving at Mole End. It was such a success that we're doing it again.

We opened the naming of the beer up to a poll right here on the blog with Valerie's idea of "Cinderella's Ruin" winning. It's such a good name that I almost feel guilty that we've stolen a possible beer name from her and Dave.

So the road to ruin all started yesterday with the almost impossible task of finding 8 kg of pumpkin flesh about a month earlier than it is generally in the shops. All the usual beer ingredients were easy enough to get our hands on, in fact easier than usual as I now cycle home from work past the brewing shop, although cycling with that extra 6 kg of grain in my backpack was hard going. The pumpkin however was a bit of a challenge, so after visiting various supermarkets it was time to take on the advice of Luke and Valerie and look for tinned pumpkin.

Last year worked out perfectly as Luke (the very Mole of Mole End) had a load of frozen pumpkin in his chest freezer. Unfortunately we don't have a chest freezer to store pumpkin in, but Valerie and Luke recommended trying tinned pumpkin. Our American friends will be very familiar with tinned pumpkin, but I must confess to having never seen such a thing. So off to the organic, slightly specialised green grocers in Edinburgh.

Tinned pumpkin is pureed pumpkin flesh, in a tin. That simple, so theoretically it should be just the same. The only thing I am concerned about is that it's pureed, so I'm a little worried about how it will affect my ability to run water through my mash to extract all the lovely stuff from the grains. I didn't have that worry last year as when I originally made this beer I used a different type of brewing where all the grain and pumpkin was in a fine mesh bag. I may resort to at least putting the pumpkin into a bag this year.

Unfortunately, the style of beer we are making takes around two months to be ready to drink (at its best anyhow) so to have it ready for thanksgiving on Nov 28th means getting a head start so until we have a huge chest freezer where we can store pumpkin flesh for the coming year, tinned pumpkin it is..

There may be some of you reading this and thinking, "Pumpkin beer? I'm sure I've never seen that in my local." And you'd be right. Pumpkin ale is very much an American thing, especially around thanksgiving when all things pumpkin go bump in the night.

There are records of pumpkin beer in the states as early as 1801 although maybe not as we would recognise it today. The beer I'm making uses pumpkin as an additional flavouring, whereas back in the early years of the US, pumpkins were used as a source of fermentable sugar from which to make beer as the availability of barley wasn't great. Nowadays chances are when you pick up a commercial pumpkin beer there's no guarantee that there will even be pumpkin in your pumpkin beer. A large amount of commercial brewers add pumpkin pie spices to their beer to give it the association of pumpkin, but don't actually include any pumpkin in the production of the beer.

I'm adding both, the spices are from Valerie's pumpkin pie recipe, but it's very subtle.

If you fancy trying to make my version of pumpkin beer, here's my recipe (very simplified).

Cinderella's Ruin -spiced pumpkin ale

- 5 kg pale malt
- 0.7 kg crystal malt 20L

- 0.03 kg chocolate malt
- 8 kg pumpkin flesh

Mash the grains and pumpkin at 68 degrees C for 60 mins

Boil the resulting wort for 60 mins with the following hop additions

- Styrian Goldings 5.19% 30 g at beginning of the boil
- Styrian Goldings 5.19% 30 g for 10 mins
- Styrian Goldings 5.19% 30 g for 5 mins

I do a 2 stage fermentation;

2 weeks primary

2 weeks secondary (add your spices)

Then 30 days to condition.

Then enjoy, preferably with friends.