

FROM BOTTLES OF BOXES

ALTERNATIVE
WINE
PACKAGING
TAKES INNOVATION
TO THE NEXT LEVEL
BY LOUISE JORDAN DWS



Americans have always used the packaging that wine comes in as an indicator of its quality. *In the past, jug and boxed wines usually meant cheap, bottom of the barrel wines, but that has all changed in the past couple of years.* Not only have more and more alternative forms of wine packaging hit the market, but consumers can now trust that the wine inside will be good quality. From screw cap closures, to boxes and Tetra Paks, the evolution of wine packaging is underway.

SCREW CAPS

While natural cork still dominates with 80% market share, according to Wine Business Monthly's 2007 Closure Survey, screw caps have increased their position over the prior year by almost 25%. The most commonly found wines in screw cap are white wines, imports and wines priced between \$8 and \$11.99. However, Boisset America's De Loach's Sonoma Stage Pinot Noir 2005, which retails for \$85, is the first ultra premium wine to have a high-end screw cap called Stelvin Lux+, which Jean Charles Boisset, president of Boisset-America and vice president of Boisset La Famille des Grands Vins, says, "offers a slight oxygenation of the wine through the seal, allowing it to age with tremendous results."

While nationally screw cap sales account for 4% of the total 750 ml table wine sales, at www.wine.com it is 17.5%. Rich Bergsund, CEO of www.wine.com, attributes this growth to suppliers pushing screw caps "because they don't want to see up to 5% of their efforts wasted due to cork taint. And consumers are driving the growth because they understand there are many high quality wines in screw caps." When asked if Americans are finally comfortable with buying screw caps, Bergsund comments: "Our consumers are high income, highly educated and younger than the average wine consumer. At least for this group, any negative image about screw caps seems to be going away, and this group will definitely drive future wine consumption trends in America."

WINE IN BOXES, CASKS AND TANKS

According to a recent report from ACNielsen, boxed wine is now the fastest growing wine category in the United States. Three-liter boxed wine grew in volume by 45% in 2006 compared to only 3% growth in volume of table wine. Paige Poulos, founder of the Alliance for Innovative Wine Packaging (AIWP) and president of Paige Poulos Communications, says, "With the release of Black Box wines in 2001, bag-in-box or cask wines emerged onto

the mainstream market, changing the common 5L-sized package to a more sleek-looking 3L container. At the time of their debut, innovative packages were offered by value wine producers. Today, the movement toward innovative packaging is being led by premium and ultra-premium wine producers.”

Bag-in-box keeps the wine fresh and free from oxidization (up to a month), because the bag inside contracts as the volume of wine decreases, unlike bottles, which are exposed to air as soon as they are opened. People can now find boxed wines with quality wine from around the world, including: Italy (Tavernello), France (Chateau des Alouettes), South Africa (Rain Dance), Australia (Fish Eye), Washington State (Washington Hills) and California (Killer Juice). Poulos adds: “Consumers who prefer convenient packaging and quality are leading this trend, and tend to skew younger.”

MÁS Wine Company, a negociant firm in Sonoma, has introduced the first airtight, wine “mini tank.” These tanks are environmentally-friendly, reusable and mimic the way wine is stored at a winery, holding 3.85 gallons of wine (20 750ml bottles). Through the use of a nitrogen gas chamber, the wine is kept fresh, with no chance of oxidation. MÁS is mostly targeting restaurants and bars that could greatly benefit from the elimination of corked wines, shipping costs and reduced time opening and cleaning up after glass bottles. Andy Woehl, president of the MÁS Wine Company, says, “MÁS wines are perfect for on-premise accounts with an active by-the-glass program because they are saving a lot of money. MÁS wines come down to \$6.75 a bottle (20 bottles per “mini tank”), where as an individual glass, would cost closer to \$10 or \$11.”



MÁS Wine Company offers both a red and white wine, the varietals changing each vintage depending on what is available and works best for the overall quality of each wine. Woehl adds, “MÁS are a café style wines that are fun, friendly and always taste good.”

TETRA PAKS

One of the most popular Tetra Paks found in the market today is Boisset’s French rabbit, which really stands out on a shelf in their flashy, orange containers. “French rabbit, and its revolutionary Tetra Pak packaging, can have a very dramatic impact on our environmental footprint by reducing the energy required to produce, package and ship wine – by reducing greenhouse gases associated with shipping wine and by reducing packaging waste,” says Boisset. “French rabbit has no cork, no label, no capsule and no glass – only a very thin, very resource efficient cardboard container made from renewable materials.” So not only can consumers feel good about “going green” with their wine choices, French rabbit is practical to use and good value for their money (the 1 Liter package gives the consumer 33% more wine than a regular 750ml bottle).

Three Thieves, who introduced the innovative and slightly cheeky, 1 Liter Jug of wine a couple of years ago, is back with Bandit, a line of Tetra Paks in both 1 Liter and 4 x 250ml – which are currently available in every state. Charles Bieler, one of the three men that founded Three Thieves (along with Joel Gott, owner of Joel Gott Winery and Roger Scommegna), says, “With non-glass containers, there are now a lot of opportunities to bring wine on boats, to beaches, while hiking and on golf courses, when in the past, consumers may have been hesitant.” He adds, “What’s exciting is that



CORK VS. SCREW CAP

In March of this year, I attended a tasting held by the Wine Media Guild called Cork vs. Alternative Closures. We tasted multiple examples of the same wine (from the same vintage) that had been bottled with 2 different types of closures, usually cork and screw cap. Among the wines tasted were 4 sets of Laroche wines from Chablis. In 2002, Michel Laroche, owner and winemaker, decided to hold an experiment and bottled that vintage in both cork and screw cap.

Laroche said, “With screw cap, I know that the wine I put into the bottle – with all its freshness, acidity and clean, fruity aromas – will be the same wine my customers taste. With cork, there is much more bottle variation and problems with oxidized wines.” The tasting confirmed his observation because the difference between the two was profound. The wines bottled with cork were much more developed – with nutty and dried fruit aromas and less acidity. While the wine bottled with screw cap were much more vibrant and fresh, with more fruity and mineral characteristics and livelier acidity.

WHAT ARE AIRLINES SAYING ABOUT ALTERNATIVE WINE PACKAGING?

Diane Teitelbaum, wine consultant for American Airlines, and Doug Frost MS MW, wine consultant for United Airlines, say there still seems to be a long road ahead for alternative wine packaging products to become the norm. Teitelbaum says, “AA is not currently using alternative packaging and has no plans to make that change.” And Frost comments, “We have looked at many options, but we continue to use glass for its ability to store wines in the best possible condition for the longest possible duration.” Teitelbaum sums it up by saying, “My personal thoughts are that dining in the air is the same as in a restaurant. I would expect the same standards to be upheld regarding amenities of ambience.” So until the average American considers Tetra Paks and boxed wines to be as stylish and sophisticated as glass bottled wines, there will still be room for growth in the airline sector regarding alternative packaging.

FPO SAUZA AD

big buyers like WalMart are giving priority treatment to producers who are packaging products in more responsible, lighter and smaller packages. Green thinking doesn't just feel good, it can save dollars."

Along with saving money and reducing the environmental impact of shipping, Bieler adds, "The single serve 250ml Bandit cartons are perfect for a situation where one person wants a red wine, another person a beer, and another a white wine. Normally, in such a situation, no one opens a bottle of wine, as a 750ml is just too much. Our 250ml cartons bring beer-like consumption to wine and allow people to consume wine more regularly."

CANS

In 2004, Francis Ford Coppola's winery first launched their sparkling wine, Sofia (Blanc de Blancs, NV) in cans. By going after the younger, female trend setters, aka the "Sex in the City" crowd, Sofia became an instant success with its sleek and flashy, bright pink look with individually wrapped straws.

At the recent Vinexpo in June, Boisset unveiled its Mommessin brand, Beaujolais and Macon-Villages, in silver, sleek aluminum cans. They are easily recyclable and able to chill quickly, the preferable way to serve Beaujolais.

PET PLASTIC BOTTLES

PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic bottles are light, safe and great for outdoor events or places where glass is not allowed, like sporting arenas or airlines. They weigh less so wine makers can save on costs of freight and distribution. In 2005, Fetzer Vineyards and Beringer's Stone Cellars were the first to launch single serving 187ml plastic bottles.

Yellow Jersey from Boisset, a new wine that is not yet available in the U.S., has a screw cap that rests atop a plastic bottle. Boisset comments, "Yellow Jersey is the first brand of wine in a 750ml PET plastic bottle to utilize a new technology in PET called MonOxbar – which actively consumes oxygen that would otherwise enter the wine through the bottle's wall." He adds that PET bottles benefit



the consumer as they are unbreakable and reduce environmental waste.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi has just introduced the wine industry's first ever mini wine pack, with twelve 187ml glass wine bottles in three varieties: Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. "We know consumers have many different needs when it comes to wine, and not all are met with one 750ml bottle. This wine pack comes in a convenient format that is ideal for all occasions," says Kevin Connor, marketing director for Woodbridge by Robert Mondavi. Benefits include: simple serving size, fresh wine every time, no corkscrew needed and easy storage.

Nienburg-based Rexam Glass has recently released the first stackable wine bottle. "The consumer no longer needs a special wine rack. And for wine merchants, storage can be optimized because these bottles take up less space," says Hans-Jürgen Schmidt, director of marketing.

THE REVOLUTION WILL CONTINUE

With access to an almost unlimited amount of information about wine on the Internet, Americans are more flexible in their wine choices than ever before. Stereotypes are quickly thrown out the door, as consumers trust their palates more and more, and see the value and convenience in alternative packaging. Bieler concludes, "I think the younger set is leading the way, though I see a commonality in the consumers who buy our products, which is that they are more linked by their open-mindedness than by age." And with that continued flexible outlook, who knows what original and creative packaging we might see next. ■

