



Plastic Promise

By: Dana Stone

Wine in a box. Screw tops. And now, plastic bottles. For wine collectors and purists, these packaging options create angst and agony, but for the casual wine drinker the benefit is two-fold: plastic packaging blends sustainability solutions with portability solutions. For the wine industry, the value is also two-fold: being seen as an environmental steward with business benefits.

The glass and cork ceiling has been slowly chipped away since 2005. Plastic bottles have been making inroads from a start within the airline and hospitality industries and are now heading into more deliberate and direct placements.

Patrick Field founded his eco-friendly bottling company after a post-9/11, in-flight moment. When presented with a plastic butter knife for his meal, he noticed his wine was served in a small glass bottle. If broken “the bottle’s serrated edge was more of a weapon than a knife,” he says. Field married that thought into his father’s plastic injection-molding business with his mother’s wine industry background to create the first PET plastic wine bottles for commercial use. He began manufacturing 187ml bottles for his first winery customer, Beringer in 2005. The business evolved into what is now EnVino in Burlingame, California.

For sustainability practices, Field says plastic offers “more wine, less packaging” as well as a smaller carbon footprint. A plastic 750ml bottles holds 33% more wine than a glass bottle. One glass bottle weighs more than six plastic bottles. Three gallons of water are used in manufacturing a glass bottle versus one-half gallon for plastic. Additionally, the plastic process produces 52% less greenhouse gases and 53% less air pollution. Innovations have allowed for oxygen barrier technology to seal in and extend

a wine’s flavor, albeit still a shorter shelf life than glass.

Ball Corporation of Broomfield, Colorado also offers glass alternatives to the wine industry. Sutter Home Winery began using their plastic bottles for 187ml servings in limited markets in 2005. The winery announced in July that all 187ml wine bottles sold throughout the U.S would be using PET plastics bottles supplied by Ball Corp.

“Sutter Home made the decision to switch to plastic wine bottles because of our ongoing efforts to become more environmentally friendly,” says Wendy Nyberg, senior director of marketing for Sutter Home in a July news release. “The plastic bottles weigh only one sixth what the glass bottles weigh and they’re much smaller, so consumers get the same amount of wine in a smaller, unbreakable, less wasteful and recyclable bottle.”

Some brands see plastic as way to target environmentally-conscious consumers from the beginning. For the Wolf Blass Green Label wine, life-cycle sustainability practices are part of the product’s DNA. Foster Group’s Wolf Blass Green Label wine supports the organization’s Carbon Reduction Program, part of its larger sustainability program. “We have global targets in place for energy and water efficiency, which aims to reduce energy usage by 10% and water usage by 10% per unit of production by 2011 against 2007 levels,” says Scott Delzoppo, Sustainability Manager for Foster’s Group. The winery operations have been audited to manage “environmental impacts and opportunities.”

“The launch of Wolf Blass Green Label is an exciting milestone in the Australian wine industry. Green Label builds on this sustainable approach, providing an alternate packaging choice for consumers with a lower greenhouse footprint.

Fog Mountain in a 1 liter PET bottle



Label in PET produces 29% less greenhouse gas emissions over the entire life cycle of the product when compared to the same wine in the most commonly used industry standard 750mL glass wine bottle," says Delzoppo.

Delzoppo says Wolf Blass has undertaken and accessed consumer research, advising that more than 95% of consumers say they would like "brands to show them how they are helping climate change and the environment. Green Label responds to the needs of today's more conscious consumer, who want to do their bit for the environment. It is early days, but the signs are promising for products that feature sustainable practices." Not yet available in the United States, Delzoppo says this is part "of a larger exploratory journey."

Both EnVino and Ball Corporation now offer 750mL and 1liter packaging options. Boisset Family Estates, the Burgundy, France-based wine and spirits maker began U.S. distribution in July of Fog Mountain Merlot in EnVino's one-liter PET bottle, the first California wine in the larger sized product. Ball Corp. supplies 750mL-sized bottles for Painted Turtle and Twin Fin in Canada.

Water, sodas and juice brands have long been sold in plastic bottles. Will consumers buy PET plastic packaging when it comes to wine? Jennifer Hoover, manager of communications for Ball Corp says, "I think consumer acceptance varies depending on the demographics.

Younger consumers are much more accepting of plastic alcohol packaging, or any alternative packaging, because they have grown up with and are used to drinking from plastic."

Field sees plastic as complementing its glass bottled counterparts, saying it is not "for the cellar" wines. DelZappo says the Wolf Blass Green Label is targeted at "typical wine consumers between 35 to 54 years old. Wine plays an important role in their social lives and they enjoy sharing a glass with friends and family. They are environmentally aware and are proud to highlight the contributions they make to assisting with this process, without compromising on taste, quality or their wine drinking experience."

Plastic bottled wines targets the "lifestyle" or "occasion" wine drinker; people who drink their wine the same day to a few months of the purchase. That is 80% of the market according to Field. Plastic also offers new venues the ability to serve wine where glass is prohibited

such as concert, sporting or outdoor venues, opening up newer market opportunities in addition to offering an important value proposition for the environmentally-conscious wine consumer. ■



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