



drinking

OUTSIDE THE BOX

THE TIME FOR FINE BOX WINE HAS COME

Fine wine in a box? That may be the reaction of many skeptics, but it may be time to drink outside the box.

For years, we have been told that wine packaged in a plastic bladder within a box is efficient, environmentally friendly, better priced and more convenient. All of this is true. The problem has been that the wines put in boxes have been of inferior quality. The advantages of the packaging did not outweigh the drawbacks.



A VARIETY OF WINES ARE AVAILABLE IN 3-LITER BOXES.

Now, vintners are beginning to sell more quality wines in boxes. The **Octavin** is a packaging innovation used by Underdog Wines of Livermore, Calif. Adam Richardson, director of winemaking for Underdog, heads a team that works with an array of award-winning winemakers from around the globe to craft premium wines from some of the world's best known wine regions that can be packaged in boxes.

"American wine drinkers are more and more internationally focused, so we scour the world looking for new and exciting wines and develop partnerships with these growers and winemakers," Richardson says.

The product is not the old bag-in-the-box situation. The Octavin international series of wines include Silver Birch Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand; Monthaven Chardonnay from Monterey; Seven, a red blend from the renowned Osborne family of Spain; Boho Old Vine Zinfandel from California; Big House Red blend from California; and Pinot Noir and Pinot Grigio, known collectively as Pinot Evil.

Richardson may oversee a harvest in New Zealand in February, another in Australia, and check on California vineyards in early April. He then follows harvests in Europe and California in the fall, participating in blending after fermentation and aging of different lots.

After the wine is made, it's shipped in giant bladders to Underdog's facility in Livermore and repackaged in double-layered Octavin bags.

"We want the wine that we make to arrive in the consumer's hands as high (in) quality, (and in as) fresh and lively condition as when it left our winery," Richardson says. "That sometimes is an issue with the more traditional bottle package."

Each Octavin, or "home cask," as Richardson refers to the packages, holds 3 liters, the equivalent of four standard (750 ml.) bottles.

Many users extol Octavin's environmental benefits: There is no glass, no label and no cork. The packaging saves space and reduces transportation costs, with reported 92 percent package recycling-potential after use, as well as a 55 percent carbon footprint reduction during production.

Then there is the question of deterioration once a package is opened. "The plastic bladder inside the cardboard package actually is sealed to keep the wine fresh and away from air during manufacture and shipping," Richardson says. "After the wine is opened, and the pour tap is utilized, the wine is still sealed. We estimate shelf life in the customer's refrigerator to be six weeks from the first pour."

Wine drinkers can literally keep several home casks in their refrigerators and have a different glass of wine every evening with dinner. Or they can offer an array of varietals with less risk of waste.

The real way to test the package and the product is to try it. As always, the label only tells you so much, even if it's printed on a box. ☛

The above wines are available at Breaux Marts, Rouses and Economical stores for approximately \$20 each.

