

Wine from the Big House

May 6, 2010 by John Brown

Remember the days of old when buying jug wine was a normal practice for most of us who wanted to enjoy a daily glass or two, but were constrained by a limited budget? In days of yore, I uncorked (or unscrewed) countless jugs of Carlo Rossi, Hearty Burgundy, Cribari and a host of other unpronounceable (and sometimes undrinkable) wines.

Today, jug wine still exists in the marketplace, but most of us have traded up to smaller sized bottles where the cost per ounce has increased, but the quality is much improved. The other issue with large format bottles is that keeping the wine fresh over a few days (if it is not consumed on the day it is opened) is problematic.

That problem, though, is easily resolved by either wolfing down the entire jug or pouring the remaining wine into a smaller bottle and eliminating the air space in the vessel so it will not spoil. However, you're still faced with the quality issue. In recent tastings of jugs versus inexpensive wines in 750 ml bottles (e.g. fifths), the clear winners have been the wines in the smaller containers.

Just about the time I was about to declare the case closed, I had the opportunity to sip a jug style wine from a re-packaged version of an old idea – the “bag in the box.” This particular wine, 2008 Big House Red, is packaged in a 3-liter Octavin (a octagonal box) and is a blend of ... get this... 23% syrah, 14% petite sirah, 9% grenache, , 6% mourvedre, 17% sangiovese, 6% algianico, 6% tannat, 5% nero d'avola, 4% sargentino, 3% touriga, 3% barbera, 3% petit verdot.

I've actually heard of most of these grapes!

Here's what the winery says about the Octavin: “Octavin Home Wine Bar's patent-pending package design prevents oxidation. Every glass tastes as fresh and flavorful as if the wine was just opened, even up to six weeks after your first sip. It's the perfect choice for those interested in just one glass with dinner.”

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Well, actually, this wine is so good I had more than one glass with dinner. At approximately \$25 for the Big House Red Octavin, you get the equivalent of about six bottles of wine at \$4 each. And the Octavin actually works incredibly well. I've had mine in the refrigerator now for about five weeks and the quality is the same now as when I poured the first glass.

Now, I'm not suggesting that all bag in the box wines will be of the same quality, but this one is really good with ripe and rich dark fruit flavors and decent acidity which allows it to pair nicely with foods such as lasagna, grilled baby back ribs and stuffed red peppers