

Beyond the bottle: Boxed wine offers value and taste

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MODERN WINE marketing gimmicks sometimes make me long for the old days of drab, nearly indecipherable labels and unabashed tannic bitterness in the bottle.

A stroll down the retailer's wine aisle today can be frightening, what with all of those sensationalized brand names such as "Running With Scissors," and all of those menacing Day-Glo critters, including "3 Blind Moose."

As a rule, too, the harder the label screams "gimmick," the more residual sugar you'll find in the wine.

On the other hand, if the product pleases me, its marketing never seems too extreme. And on that note, allow me to introduce my thumbs-up review of a line of wines debuting in Hampton Roads this spring that come in attractive, eight-sided boxes.

The line is [Octavin Home Wine Bar](#), presented by the California-based Underdog Wine Merchants.

As I've noted before, I'm a fan of bladder-in-a-box wines. I buy them frequently when I am in France, where a good Cotes du Rhone or Cotes du Roussillon red in a 3-liter box sets me back \$12. But the great majority of boxed wines sold in the United States are not very appealing, and the better ones are not great values.

The Octavin initiative wants to change that. I've tasted the two wines that will be the first from the line to be introduced in this market, the Monthaven Winery 2008 Chardonnay Central Coast (California) and the Big House Red 2008 California. Both are good wines for the money, \$24 for the chardonnay and \$22 for the red.

Monthaven's chardonnay tastes of tart apples and honeydew, with some roasted nuts on the finish. There are traces of minerals and sweet oak. The Big House Red is a blend of syrah, petite sirah, grenache, montepulciano, mourvedre and other varieties. The wine tastes of cherries, black pepper and spice. The eccentric winemaker Randall Grahm first concocted this wine, then sold the Big House brand.

Also coming in the eight-sided box - actually, it's more like a tower - will be Mont-haven cabernet sauvignon and merlot, Big House White, Silver Birch sauvignon blanc from New Zealand, Boho Vineyard zinfandel from California, Pinot Evil pinot noir and pinot grigio from Hungary, and Osborne "Seven" red from Spain. All will be priced from \$22 to \$24.

The prospect of getting very drinkable, everyday wines in a box appeals to my green side, too. A case of bottled wine weighs about 40 pounds, half of which is the weight of the glass. In comparison, the weight of the box and bladder is negligible. Think of the fuel that would be saved, and the recycling of glass that would not be needed if most of our wine came in plastic and paper.

