

Why Iowa ♥ John Edwards

And how he's betting the farm on their support



To Gray or Not To Gray: A Hair-Raising Question



Halo 3: The Thinking Gamer's Shoot-'Em-Up



Handy They lack the romance of corked glass bottles, but squeeze boxes, spouted cartons and plastic bottles with screw tops are easier to use



FOOD

New Wine in . . . Uh, Juice Boxes. Now vintners are going green by putting their vino in more eco-friendly containers

BY JOEL STEIN

BACK WHEN WINE WAS AN ELITIST beverage, those dusty bottles labeled with geographic descriptors and family emblems made sense. But the rigmarole we go through in order to wash down our KFC with some pinot grigio makes about as much sense as decanting a Red Bull. So winemakers are now putting their goods in juice boxes, aluminum cans like Sofia Coppola's super-hip champagne, which comes with a straw, and—in the latest packaging innovation—plastic bottles. By Mardi Gras, someone will undoubtedly be selling an oenophile's version of those drinking helmets with dual bottle holders and straws that lead to your mouth.

Wine sold in the same type of plastic bottles that Aquafina uses to hold tap water is about to hit U.S. consumers, thanks to Bob Peter, a man who buys a lot of wine. Not a lot of wine like your alcoholic uncle buys a lot of wine or even like your local wine store buys a lot of wine. As CEO of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, Peter buys wine for 12.7 million Canadians, since all the wine in that province has to be sold in government-run stores. So when he merely suggested in 2005 that wine companies find more environmentally friendly packaging, innovations happened fast.

The latest is Yellow Jersey, launched in May by big French Burgundy producer Boisset, which will be distributed only in dark-colored plastic bottles—a lot lighter than glass ones and therefore requiring less fossil fuel to transport. And Ontarians aren't the only ones ditching the glass bottle. A lot of this innovation comes from eco-forward Australians and New Zealanders, the same people who were early adopters of plastic corks and screw-top caps. More than half

the wine in Australia is sold in boxes, although that country has yet to catch up to Chile, where more than 50% of wine—basically, anything that costs less than \$25—is sold in juice box–style containers.

But success elsewhere in the world has not made wine companies confident about bringing alternative packaging to the U.S. Boisset started selling its French Rabbit in plastic boxes last year, and is still waiting for it to catch on. Even the businessman behind the wildly successful \$2 Charles Shaw wines is wary. Despite the fact that the bottle is the most expensive component of the super-cheap wine sold exclusively at crunchy consumer haven Trader Joe's, Two Buck Chuck maker Fred Franzia says he'd never abandon the romance of glass and cork.

Still, countries that are far stodgier about wine than the U.S. are starting to change. The English have bought wine in plastic packs for years. Even some vintners in France, whose wine industry has been in trouble because of worldwide competition and overproduction, are experimenting with alternatives to glass. Jean-Charles Boisset, whose family business is a market leader, likens wine drinkers and their adaptability to the consumers of another once upscale product. "You squeeze mustard from a plastic bottle, when you traditionally got it from a glass bottle," he says matter-of-factly.

I drank Boisset's wines, and the Yellow Jersey sauvignon blanc, at \$15, wasn't bad. In fact, I felt, oddly, snobbishly worldly pouring it from a plastic bottle. It was as if I were saying, I drink so much wine that I don't have to pretend that this slightly flat grapefruit explosion I'm going to down with leftovers is special. Plus, I tend to drop things a lot when I drink. ■

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