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Wine Packaging Lightens Up: More Appealing Wines Are Available in Eco-Friendly Containers, Offering Good Value and Lower Carbon Footprints

by [Sharon Kapnick](#)

Heavy glass bottles served well for hundreds of years, ever since commercially produced bottles and corks were joined together in the 17th century. It wasn't until the second half of the 20th century that plastic bottles, aluminum cans and cartons became popular for many non-alcoholic beverages. Today — at last — wine packaging is starting to catch up. Spurred on by environmental issues and the current frugality-is-in mentality, more and more enterprising wine producers are exploring alternative containers.

No one has embraced the innovative-packaging trend more than Jean-Charles Boisset of Boisset Family Estates (www.boissetfamilyestates.com). He cleverly puts the situation into perspective when he cites what has come to be known as Boisset's 70% Rule: More than 31.2 billion bottles of wine are consumed worldwide each year; 70% of them retail for under \$12 a bottle, 70% are consumed within 28 minutes to 3 hours of purchase, and 70% of the cost goes to packaging, shipping and related expenses. Conclusion: It's ridiculous to use 17th century technology for most 21st century wines!

The new containers have many advantages. They take less energy to produce, ship and recycle than conventional bottles, thus lowering their carbon footprint, and they cost less to package, store and ship. They're lightweight, easing the burden on the people who transport the wines, and convenient. Several are shatterproof and impermeable to UV rays. Some eliminate the tainted-cork nuisance, the corkscrew hassle and the spoiled-leftover-wine quandary. Box wines, for example, stay fresh up to six weeks after they're opened thanks to the vacuum-sealed bag inside that collapses as the wine is consumed, preventing oxygen from reaching and spoiling what's left.

Innovative packaging has created a win-win situation: It makes wine greener and it makes wine cheaper. Here's a survey of some of the pioneering producers and current noteworthy options:

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Cartons: In 2005, California's **Three Thieves** were the first to market domestic wine in lightweight, recyclable fruit-juice-like TetraPak containers they call **Bandits**. The cartons are made up of three layers—plastic, aluminum foil and paper. The Thieves claim it would take 26 trucks filled with empty wine bottles to equal just 1 truck filled with empty Tetra Pak cartons.

Boisset Family Estate's **French Rabbit**, from France's Languedoc-Roussillon region, debuted here the same year. The Rabbits offer vintage-dated, appellation-specific French wine in colorful 1-liter cartons with screw-top closures. According to Boisset, its cartons are just 3% of the total weight of the product; an eggshell, by comparison, is 7% of the weight of an egg.

Yellow + Blue (= green) (www.ybwines.com) cartons came to market in 2008. Matthew Soif, founder and president, worked with renowned importer Kermit Lynch for 10 years before starting out on his own. Soif's goal was to sell high-quality, certified-organic wines without all the typical environmental and dollar costs. "I'm just trying to deliver great, good-value wines without environmental drawbacks," he says. "Glass is expensive to make, ship and recycle. We take that out of the equation." Soif adds that the same wines in glass would have double the carbon footprint. And, he notes, while wine in standard glass bottles is 50% wine and 50% packaging, Yellow + Blue is 93% wine and 7% packaging.

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