

Winemaker leads in creating eco-wise packaging

By Heather Stober Fleming

Grape Expectations

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The wine industry has embraced the green movement and the accomplishments are impressive. Twenty years ago, sustainable growing was considered unique and now hundreds of wineries are practicing organic, biodynamic, and sustainable agricultural methods. Wineries are using wind and solar power to run their production facilities and their hospitality centers. Labels and boxes are being made with recycled materials and bleach-free ink. Several wineries are incorporating recycled water into their irrigation systems, and wine producers are building their new facilities to achieve LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, which is an international benchmark for buildings that are earth and environmentally friendly. It is inspiring to see what one industry has accomplished in all levels of production.

The one area that needs improvement is packaging. I attended a seminar at the Boston Wine Expo this year that was hosted by Jean-Charles Boisset, president of Boisset Family Estates. Boisset has implemented sustainable, organic, and biodynamic farming practices at the family's vineyards, while simultaneously introducing alternative packaging innovations that reduce a wine's environmental impact and carbon footprint.

The statistics he shared were a bit surprising for most of us in attendance. There are 3.1 billion cases of wine produced each year. A century ago, if a village produced wine, most of it was consumed in that village. It was distributed in large, unlabeled jugs that were rinsed and reused. Now, wine is traded and shipped internationally. Shop at almost any wine store and you can buy wine from countries around the globe. Packaging and shipping are an important piece of the puzzle.

Boisset went on to explain that 70 percent of the wine consumed around the planet retails for less than \$10 a bottle, and 70 percent of that is for the cork, caps, label, glass, cardboard cases, and transportation.

That was the surprising part of the seminar. The interesting part was how he used other products as an example to show how packaging has changed through the years and the wine industry has relatively stayed the same.

The product he chose was mustard. When he was a kid growing up in Burgundy, France, mustard came in a small clay crock and that was the only way it came. Walk down the condiments aisle of any grocery store today and look how many options there are. Glass jars, glass bottles, squeezable plastic containers that stand right side up or upside down, huge tubs at wholesale clubs and tiny to go packets at delis. The options are endless, depending on needs and preference.

There is no question that there have been changes in wine packaging. Stelvin screw caps are now widely accepted as a proper closure, fine wine in a box is gaining momentum, but the majority of wine is still packaged in a glass bottle, with a cork, capsule, and label. For the most part, the vessel that wine comes in has stayed the same.

Boisset is hoping to change that and he is leading by example. He was named "Innovator of the Year" in November 2008 by the Wine Enthusiast Magazine and he is considered a leader in modern

packaging.

Here are some examples from the Boisset Family Estates portfolio of how he and his company are changing the face of packaging.

French Rabbit: This is a vintage-dated, appellation-specific French wine that is packaged in a unique 1-liter, octagonal box with screw-top closures and label-free packaging. French Rabbit offers premium quality from the south of France, and its motto is to "savor the wine — save the planet." (Available in Massachusetts)

Deloach: We have all heard the term "bag in the box," but now there is eco-bag in a barrel. Deloach Vineyards has created a concept for restaurants for wine-by-the-glass programs. Instead of a bag in a box, Deloach offers some of their better Pinot Noir in small wine barrels that are lined with air-tight bags and have a nozzle for easy pouring. The barrel provides 67 glasses per 10-liter eco-bag in a barrel, which is 1 liter more than a 12- 750-ml bottle case. The wine stays fresh for six to eight weeks, which is an important aspect of any restaurant's wine by the glass program. (Available in Massachusetts to restaurants only.)

Fog Mountain and Yellow Jersey: Two brands that are packaged in plastic, lightweight, shatterproof containers that have a 50 percent smaller carbon footprint than glass. The vessel is made from PET (polyethylene terephthalate) with an oxygen barrier that removes oxygen and protects against light. PET is the most recycled and recyclable plastic out there, and can be recycled as a fleece jacket, a new bottle, or polyester fiber for a sleeping bag. Boisset is also packaging an A.O.C Beaujolais in the first ever aluminum wine bottle. These three brands are not currently available in Massachusetts.

For more information on Jean-Charles Boisset, visit www.boissetfamilyestates.com.

Happy Earth Day!

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