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Bartender! Pull me a glass - of Pinot Noir

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By **Leslie Gevirtz**
NEW YORK | Tue Jun 14, 2011 6:09am EDT

(Reuters) - It seems size does matter, at least when it comes to serving wine.

Some U.S. wine producers are taking a tip from their European cousins and are shipping restaurants and bars wine in kegs, instead of bottles. For consumers it should mean better wines at cheaper prices.

"I got the idea from my trip to Italy," said Chris Hall, general manager and co-owner of the Long Meadow Ranch winery in Napa California. He uses 19-liter, stainless steel kegs to serve his organic wines at his tasting room and to ship them to restaurants.

"In Italy, it is not uncommon to have good wine on draft in a casual restaurant. It's how they pour it into a carafe. And the real surprise to me was how good the wine was. There wasn't really any pretence about it. It was good, honest wine," Hall said.

His Napa neighbour, David Graves of Saintsbury Vineyard, is also shipping Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in similar sized kegs that hold the equivalent of 26 bottles to restaurants and hotels.

"The delivery truck looks pretty much like any beer truck. And this way the customer gets a fresh glass every time," Graves explained.

To push the wine from the keg, both producers use a blend of nitrogen with "just a scoosh" of carbon dioxide, the so-called Guinness blend.

"All CO2 would make it get too fizzy. This way the wine is kept at an equilibrium," said Graves, adding that the kegs are reusable.

But Linda Lindsay, founder of the Great Oregon Wine Company which produces wines under the

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Rascal label, has chosen an alternative keg, which is recyclable, to send her Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris wines to market.

She argues that the 30-liter kegs, equal to about 40 bottles, that she uses are more cost effective for the restaurants, which do not have to pay a deposit for the kegs.

"And because it's completely recyclable and very light weight, it's much greener technology and we're in Oregon. We like that," she said.

Jean-Charles Boisset, whose family owns vineyards in both France and California, is using a traditional container, French oak wine barrels, to ship wine directly to consumers as well as restaurants from both his DeLoach and Raymond Vineyards.

The barrels contain a plastic bladder, much like box wines, that can hold up to 10-liters or nearly 70 glasses of either Pinot Noir or Cabernet Sauvignon.

Whether keg or barrel, the larger formats eliminate the risk of a corked bottle, protect against oxidation and reduce both packaging and the carbon footprint, according to the wine producers.

"And it's hip," Hall said. "You don't open a restaurant, particularly in San Francisco, without wine on tap."

(Reporting by Leslie Gevirtz; editing by Patricia Reaney)

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