



## **Message in a Bottle... or a Box? A Symposium on Wine Packaging**

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Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Simon Fraser University

Will the prospect of profit or the conscience of sustainability be the most important enabler of change in wine packaging over the next five years? Opinions were split among the over 100 leading wine industry professionals who gathered at the symposium on wine packaging, with more believing it will be profit (24%) than conscience (20%), while others thought it will be the power of advertising (15%), the throne of quality (14%), or the ease of access (10%).

And what will be the most important impediment to change? Consumers' lingering attachment to the romance of the wine ritual (i.e. pulling a cork out of a bottle) took top choice by 34% of the winemakers, wine agents, wine buyers, liquor monopoly executives and journalists in attendance, followed by belief that it will be the reluctance from wine producers themselves (23%). Interestingly, other impediments cited were the lack of profit (13%), social conscience (5%), and lack of access (5%).

Fast forward to 2012... what will have been the most important driver behind the new, more-varied packaging on wine shop shelves? 35% of these symposium participants believe it will be the "green gang" driving the change, followed by the "technology wizards" (28%) and then the "quality gurus" (17%).

While consumers still have a low price point image of alternative packaging, the attending industry leaders seem a little more bullish about paying price points of \$20 and more, with 51% willing to pay that for wine in Tetra Pak, 62% for wine in plastic, and 82% for wine with a screw cap or crown cap.

These results suggest that while environmental considerations will be pushing the agenda, the industry will have to do a better job of communicating their message that there is quality wine in alternative, environmentally-friendly, more convenient packaging. That will be the primary way that higher wine price points can be achieved, thereby enabling wine producers to still make a profitable return on their wine packaging investments.

Preceding the polling, ten wine industry professionals from around the globe spoke on their views on what is available in wine packaging today and what may be around the corner.

Symposium moderator Anthony Gismondi, Wine Access editor-in-chief and Vancouver Sun columnist, opened the Symposium with the following: “The wine bottle hasn’t changed much since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The catalyst for [change] has been the whole screw cap issue that started to take place around 2000. The public couldn’t believe how easy it was to open the package and how much fun it was to start drinking wine because they had this incredible access that they felt they didn’t have before with a cork. My view is that screw caps and bag-in-a-box are just normally going to come to the forefront now that we have broken down that one single barrier that wine could perhaps be in a different package. What we’re looking for today is what that package might be and how we might embrace that as a wine community.”

Here is a short summary of the speakers’ presentations:

Kelly Wilson, Executive Director, Retail Services, British Columbia Distribution Branch cited an Ipsos Reid Report that screw top wines are well accepted, while Tetra Paks are not.

Javier Santos, Director of the Wines Business Unit, Liquor Control Board of Ontario, countered with that province’s strong initiative in embracing Tetra Pak wines.

Tracy Crawford, Director of Purchasing, Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, focused on the seasonality of alternative packaging and its relatively shorter shelf life.

Mark Tucker of Mionetto Wines in Italy described how crown caps for his sparkling wines are fun and unpretentious.

Jim Robertson from Stoneleigh and Brancott Wines in New Zealand explained how his country embraced screw cap in 2001; while in 2002 only 7% of the country’s wines were in screw cap, by 2006 90% were.

Charlie Gilmore, California’s Bonterra Winemaker, emphasized the importance of broad sustainable practices at the winery, including working with recycled glass.

Shay McQuade of Amcor Australia defended the use of glass, noting its high probability of being recycled and that other packaging may not. And with regards to purchasing wine on the basis of being kind to the environment as well, he stated: “I think that collectively we should work at getting some sort of ground rules that say here’s how we are going to measure the environmental impact.”

Bettina Ferrando of Foster’s Wine Estates promoted polyester, or rather a specific form of plastic called PET, to showcase the company’s new Wolf Blass Bilyara Reserve wines.

Jaan Koel from Tetra Pak Canada not only talked about the ease of opening and carrying his product but that “the emission savings equal to 400,000 cars off the road would occur if Canadians switched their table wine from glass to cartons.”

Australian Andrew Peace of Andrew Peace Wines believed that Tetra Pak and PET will be embraced by the younger generation, and glass will be a thing of the past.

After the presentations, Symposium facilitator Glenn Sigurdson polled the attendees on their opinions to questions related to alternative wine packaging. Here are the full results:

1. What will be the most important enabler of change?
  - 24%: the prospect of profit
  - 20%: the conscience of sustainability
  - 15%: the power of advertising
  - 14%: the throne of quality
  - 10%: the ease of access
  
2. What will be the most important impediment to change?
  - 34%: the romance of ritual
  - 23%: producer reluctance
  - 13%: the prospect of profit
  - 5%: the new age of conscience
  - 5%: the ease of access
  
3. What is the top price you would pay for a wine with a screw cap or a crown cap?
  - 52%: more than \$30
  - 17%: \$20
  - 13%: \$30
  - 2%: \$10
  
4. What is the top price you would pay for a wine in plastic?
  - 45%: \$20
  - 21%: \$10
  - 13%: \$30
  - 4%: more than \$30
  
5. What is the top price you would pay for a wine in Tetra Pak?
  - 46%: \$20
  - 34%: \$10
  - 4%: \$30
  - 1%: \$30
  
6. It is the year 2012. You have just walked into a retail liquor/wine store, and as you walk down the aisles you suddenly think to yourself how different the store looks than only 5 years ago. You look more closely and realize the difference relates to how the products are packaged. Who do you believe has been the ***most significant driver of change*** that has caused this transformation over the past five years?
  - 35%: The Green Gang
  - 28%: The Technology Wizards
  - 17%: The Quality Gurus

*Recap by Harry Hertscheg, Festival Director, and Sonia Fraser, Symposium Producer*