

New packaging big at festival

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How much does a wine's package influence what you buy?

The quick answer is "plenty"—a fact well understood by wineries for a long time.

Today, however, the story is increasingly not what's on the package but the container itself, as both wineries and consumers explore options both more convenient and environmentally friendly.

With summer around the corner, that bevvy in your backpack could be whole lot lighter.

It might surprise you, but one of the more interesting events of last week's Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival saw not one wine tasted. *Message in a Bottle ... or in a box?* brought producers and key buyers together to discuss new packaging developments.

Even if a few presentations were predictable and overly Power-pointed, one theme emerged: the drinks market is becoming driven by an increasingly environmentally conscious consumer. And in this country in great part by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. Their initiative and joint development with Boisset of French Rabbit in Tetra Pak turned out to be the most successful launch in its history.

Government monopolies long ago figured out that a major key to their survival involved balancing ever increasing revenues from liquor sales with a visible dollop of social responsibility. And not much is more socially responsible these days than putting the alco-pop or quaffer of your choice into an ostensibly more green container.



Vin-First Innovative Packaging vice-president **Kevin Ruddle** shows his alternatives to bottled quaffers at the recent Vancouver Playhouse International Wine Festival.

If you thought the onslaught on cork in favour of screw cap was something to behold, just watch as the “after glass” trend takes hold here in B.C.

What caught our attention was not so much the sometimes snoozy goings on inside the symposium but the array of containers on display outside—in particular those showcased by Vin-First Innovative Packaging, most already sold in Ontario.

In fact, if you enter “Tetra” into the LCBO’s web site, some 60 products from around the world show up. Granted, most of the wines involved are non-vintage quaffers with names like Lizard Flat or Frisky Zebras. But that’s just the point. Shipping “casual” wine with a limited life expectancy half way around the world in heavy glass doesn’t win you a whole bunch of brownie points in these increasingly carbon conscious times.

Critics suggest that the new improved Tetra Pak, while indeed lighter to ship, is still far from green, as most still wind up in landfills rather than blue boxes to be recycled. In fact, amazingly, Ontario’s LCBO only just introduced a deposit and return policy this year (Tetra Pak included).

The BCLDB is quick to point out that in this historically more environmentally conscious province the current return rate on bottles and cans is 93%.

Trends take time to creep across the Rockies in this great land of ours but you can be sure of two things: LCBO’s Tetra Pak tango will soon be felt in some way or other on our shelves. And that the battle between glass and other options is only just beginning.

According to surveys commissioned by the BCLDB, the west coast consumer is less accepting of Tetra Pak, based on perceptions of quality and table appeal.

The latest and best-targeted salvo to date comes in this skirmish comes courtesy of iconic Aussie producer Wolf Blass, which has just launched its Bilyara Reserve range in a shatterproof plastic bottle—with convenient screw cap, of course. The Blass innovation is interesting for its varietal correctness and quality.

The Hired Belly is convinced that Wolfie’s “All Blass. No glass,” quite stylin’ PET refundable and recyclable package will be a winner—especially when it comes to which bottle you’ll want to pop into your hamper. And there might even be a sparkler eventually.

Tastewise? We think you’ll be quite surprised.

These vintage specific, regional drops are well above quaffer level, offering a stone fruited, moderately oaked 2005 South Australia Chardonnay (BCLS \$15.99) and medium bodied, full-berried 2004 South Australia Cab Sauv. (BCLS \$16.99).

Either should behave themselves pretty well at any summer barbecue.

And, just think, with every sip you can savour your newly found environmental conscience.