

Florida InsideOut

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GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

WHAT TARGET KNOWS

Good wines come in square packages BY KITTY BOWE HEARTY

The technical term is "bag in box." It was invented more than 50 years ago by William R. Scholle in Chicago as a way to ship electrolytes for batteries.

Some 25 years ago, Australians began using it to hold wine. Now more than half of Australian wine sold in Australia comes bag-in-box and the idea is catching on in Europe. Cheaper to ship, cheaper to package, easier to store, wine in a (bag in a) box is finally gaining acceptance in the United States, where sales of boxed wine rose 160 percent from March 2003 to March 2005.

Gone are the days when boxed wine was a giant, cheap keg. Now there are three boxes containing dated vintages and many varietals. Consumers can choose cabernet, shiraz, merlot, chardonnay, number of blends. (A three-liter box equivalent of four 750 milliliter bottles.) Established vineyards selling wines include Hardy's of Australia (the name Hardy's Stamp), Banrock and Fish Eye. Trinchero Family from Napa Valley packs the wines so at Target in distinctive berry-red or mustard-yellow wine cubes and mini wine cubes.

The three-liter Target wine cube (only \$15.99) is available in seven varieties including the light but pleasant cabernet/shiraz blend and a refreshing pinot grigio. Those two varieties are also available in the mini wine cube (\$8.99), which holds a little under two liters.

Ryan Sproule created Black Box Wines in 2003 specifically as a premium boxed wine; his cabernet, merlot and chardonnay have won in competition against bottled wines. Killer Juice's 2003 cabernet sauvignon (\$18 for a three-liter box) is medium-bodied and nicely balanced, with a mild, spicy aroma. Trove Wines of Madera, California, sells a three-liter boxed cabernet for \$25 that is surprisingly complex.

In addition to their less expensive packaging costs (which are

reflected in cheaper prices on a per-bottle basis), boxed wines, once opened and refrigerated if necessary, can hold their taste as long as four weeks. That's because the bag inside the box contracts as the wine is poured, preventing oxidation.

Three-liter boxes of Killer Juice, Black Box, Hardy's Stamp and Fish Eye wines are available in southern Florida at ABC Fine Wine & Spirits. French rabbit wines are available at Publix supermarkets. For information on Trove wines, visit www.trove-wines.com.

This year, Boisset America introduced cabernet and pinot noir table wines with powerful aromas and pleasing textures for \$9.99 a liter. They labeled the wines French rabbit (which sounds like some kind of sex toy) and put them in jazzy, recyclable bag-in-box Tetra containers made of paperboard, food-grade polyethylene plastic and aluminum foil. The Tetra container has a

screw top, which offers even stronger protection against exposure to oxygen. There is also a French rabbit chardonnay, which has intense flavors with hints of citrus and honey.

Three Thieves (a venture of Joel Gott, a respected winemaker in Napa Valley, and two other winemakers) sells its pinot grigio and cabernet sauvignon at Whole Foods in individual 1.75-liter Tetra containers, four for \$9. (Don't sneer at the screw-top Tetra packaging: Domäne Chandon is releasing its prestigious cuvée Etoile and Etoile rosé with a crown cap like those on soft drinks and beer.)

With the growth in sales and acceptance of boxed wines, it is clear that smart wine drinkers know that what matters is taste, not packaging; the manufacturers knew that already and were just waiting for consumers and retailers to catch up. ■

GRAPHIC GRAPES
Winemakers from Killer Juice to Boisset America (French rabbit) are marketing their products in boxes. Even Target is selling decent wine in a box, seen in the yellow cube at left and the berry-red cube at bottom.

