

Wine Guy: Consumers showing preferences for new packaging, especially cans

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What initially looked like a fad, a marketing Hail Mary, now looks like it could be a bona fide wine category.

Recent market research about wine-buying preferences has suggested shifts in consumer preferences for packaging alternatives to bottles. Particularly, the data revealed a rise in sales of canned wine, which notably tends to be sold in smaller formats and promotes convenience. Total growth in wine sales the last year was 3 percent, while growth in canned wines was 80 percent, according to the Nielsen data.

Similarly, recent research by WICresearch found strong consumer preference for smaller sizes of wine-in-a-can. Respondents said they preferred smaller can size because of convenience, occasion, sustainability and portion control/variety sampling. Even within the category, there seems to be a move to the 250 ml format (roughly equivalent to 1 1/2 glasses, sold in 4 packs) and the 187 ml size (essentially one glass), though the 375 ml package (equal to two ample glass pours) still leads sales.

As far as types of canned wine, rosé led the growth with nearly double the annual sales of other leading varietals, though white wines still are slightly more popular. I tasted samples from six brands and found most of the wines to be good quality, especially for the modest prices. Not surprising, this isn't where you go for complexity and depth. But you can expect bright, fresh, fruity and varietally accurate wines.

Canned Oregon: From the highly respected Stoller Winery and definitely focused on appealing to the outdoor adventure lifestyle. I found each of the wines — including rosé, pinot noir and white bubbles — to be of good quality, but I especially enjoyed the pinot gris and rosé bubbles.
(\$6/375 ml)

Cascadian Outfitters: From Goose Ridge Estate in Columbia Valley and owned by a family with about a hundred-year history of farming Vineyards in Washington. The rosé, chardonnay and red blend all were of high quality. These wines are promoted as among the only canned wines to be sourced from all estate vineyards.
(\$5/375 ml)

Joe to Go: A brand of canned wine recently added to the “Wine by Joe” portfolio, the everyday wine project of Dobbles Family Estate in Dundee, Oregon. The pinot gris, rosé and pinot noir are solid wines. (\$7/375 ml)

Prophecy: Another Gallo brand, this one benefits from the company’s international reach. Of the wines I tasted, I most appreciated the sauvignon blanc, sourced from Marlborough, New Zealand, and rosé, from southern France. (\$13/250 ml 2-packs)

So the marketing pitch, in this case, generally fits the wines. These wines are ideal for casual occasions such as the pool, patio, beach, ballpark, picnics, concerts, hikes, and camping — all the places where bottles are precarious.

Dark Horse: This is one of Gallo’s most popular brands in bottle and now also in cans. To me, the pinot grigio, rosé, and brut bubbles were pleasantly straightforward. The rosé bubbles was a notable exception with its fresh cherry, raspberry and crisp palate. (\$6/375 mml)

Day Owl: From O’Neill Vintners & Distillers (maker of national brands Line 39, Harken, Exitus, Robert Hall and Austerity). Made with grapes from California’s Central Valley and Central Coast, this rosé is delightfully bright and refreshing. (\$7/375 ml)