Lighter bottles, tougher cardboard

14 May 2009 by Jancis Robinson

There are heartening signs that heavy wine bottles are on the way out. As many of you know, we have been campaigning against bodybuilder bottles here since 2006. We've also run our Name and shame heavy bottles listings, and I have been asking all correspondents to join me in rejecting polystyrene for packing bottles. I outlined some of the issues earlier this year in Red, white and green.

As a detester of polystyrene for bottle packaging, I was delighted to receive a sample of a new and very sturdy **cardboard wine shipper** from sustainable UK packaging company Knopak. It has taken me some time to get to grips with this 'Incase' wine packaging (shown here open and closed) because they initially sent me a sample with a bottle of wine in it (by chance, the bottle of NZ Pinot Gris from the Co-op whose revealing list of ingredients I outlined in the recent E numbers and other additions in wine thread). I therefore didn't realise that it was the packaging I was meant to be taking notice of and put it straight into the recycling bin. After some correspondence they sent another example *without* a bottle, which made it much more remarkable. It seemed capable of holding even fat champagne bottles, and comes in a two-bottle version too apparently. I'm impressed and hope that some of the many importers, retailers and public relations people who mail single bottles in the UK will take a look at this, or some of its direct competitors made from cardboard. This particular example can be stored flat, can be assembled very easily, requires no tape and is less bulky than some. In general, carboard packaging for bottles can be very strong and reliable nowadays, as the French post office's rather bulky models have proved over many years. For more details of this new British product, contact nik@knopak.com

Australia is a wine exporter whose bottles tend to travel furthest. On Tuesday O-I, principal bottler supplier to the Australian wine industry, launched a new lightweight wine bottle weighing only 330g that, crucially, looks just like much heavier versions. O-I's Asia Pacific president Greg Ridder, whom I came across at Mt Difficulty winery in Central Otago earlier this year, claims, 'This is a great marriage of timing when you consider the issues of sustainability, emissions, energy and moderation of packaging and resources. This is a staggering one-off reduction and represents one of the most significant advancements in the history of wine bottle making in Australia.' When I bumped into him again at Matthew Jukes 100 tasting in Australia House on Tuesday, he said that the new bottles has already been warmly welcomed by O-I's customers. They reckon this new **Lean and Green™ wine bottle** will save up to 20,000 tonnes of glass packaging a year.(See the second page of this Rioja DOCa thread in members' forum for an account of how much purple pager Victor de la Serna calculates he is saving by switching to lighter bottles for his Finca Sandoval wines.)

Also in Australia, Foster's have announced that they are putting Wolf Blass wines into **plastic bottles**, following the trial in late 2007 noted in Whites for the holidays. I'm still worried about plastic's effect on wine if it is in contact with it for more than very few months, but there is no doubting that there will be a massive weight saving, and I think there are some great applications for this technology – quarter bottles of wine for airlines, for instance. Just so long as there is discipline about recycling this product of a non renewable resource.

Now, we need a concerted effort to convince **Argentina'**s prime bottle supplier and its customers to abandon their attempts to break records for wine bottle weight. And not all wine producers in the **US** and **Italy** seem to realise the full implications of using heavy bottles either.

Yesterday at the London International Wine Trade Fair, Britain's **WRAP** (Waste & Resources Action Programme) initiative announced that since its launch in 2006, its GlassRite Wine project had also saved 20,000 tonnes of wine bottle glass – 'equivalent to over 3,600 African elephants' is how they put it. WRAP is also very proud of having increased bulk imports into the UK, the world's largest importer of wine, by over 90 million litres, meaning that nearly 115 million glass bottles were filled in the UK. This is not good news for the likes of Greg Ridder, of course, but it has added new impetus to the recyclying of glass bottles in the UK. Organisations already taking part in the unappetisingly-named Glassrite Wine project include major names such as Constellation Europe, Kingsland Wine & Spirits, Pernod Ricard, Quinn Glass and Tesco. WRAP would of course like to sign up more participants.

15 Jun An Italian wine producer has drawn my attention to this particularly neat solution to a strong, cardboard alternative to polystyrene. See www.ewsp.it