

Thinking inside the box

or the can, the pouch, the carton... a heavy glass bottle is no longer the only option for your wine, and if you care about the environment you'll be delighted to know that the choice and quality of wines in alternative packaging is getting better all the time

REPORT RUPERT JOY



Wine has been presented in glass bottles for so long now that the association between the product and its packaging is umbilical. We have come to think of wine as belonging in bottles. It is an association that has served wine lovers well: glass is inert, robust and attractive; and no one has yet invented a viable alternative for ageing wine. Over the years, other formats have been launched for 'drink now' wine, from bag-in-box (BIB) to aluminium cans and plastic bottles. But they have had a chequered history. Until fairly recently the wine inside was often cheap, not always cheerful, and sometimes prone to oxidation or other faults.

That is starting to change. A quiet revolution is underway, driven by the climate crisis, better packaging technology, lifestyle changes and young entrepreneurs who are determined to prove that presenting high-quality wine in non-glass formats is not only viable, but more convenient and better for the planet. For wine lovers concerned about the environmental impact of glass (*see April 2022 issue, 'A heavy price'*) or just ready to try something different, a growing range of delicious and increasingly classy wines are available in smart, more sustainable packaging.

RAISING THE BAR

After conducting a carbon self-audit in 2021, Jason Haas of Tablas Creek in California was 'blown away' by how much of his winery's footprint came

from glass bottles alone. He had dismissed moving to BIB because of its low-cost image in the US, but, he says: 'A friend said to me, there has to be a high-end winery that goes first. I spent a lot of time thinking about that and decided he was right.' Haas cautiously launched his Patelin de Tablas Rosé 2021 in 3-litre BIBs this year at US\$95 (*tablascreek.com*). They sold out in less than four hours. 'The feedback was unbelievably positive. People are excited to confound their friends' expectations. It's the cutting edge of sustainability.'

Jessica Julmy was similarly surprised to discover, while developing the LVMH flagship sustainability project at Château Galoupet in Provence (*chateaugaloupet.com*), that 40% of its carbon footprint came from packaging. 'I realised it was no use planting trees and fostering an ecosystem without tackling that.' After comparing non-glass formats, she decided to package her second wine Nomade in a flat polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottle made of recycled plastic salvaged from coasts at risk of ocean pollution. Julmy admits that bottling a £20-plus classed growth rosé in PET was not an easy decision. 'There are so many preconceived ideas about plastic,' she says.

In the UK, a group of innovative, like-minded wine companies launched the Wine Traders for Alternative Formats (*thewtaf.co.uk*) in 2021, aimed at reducing reliance on single-use glass bottles. 'Sustainability is a huge motivator, but quality is the key,' says WTAF founding member Ollie Lea of the The BIB Wine Co (*bibwine.co.uk*). 'The more quality wine is put into alternative packaging, the more it is showing its potential. Our aim is to push the boundaries upwards.' Lea, whose 2019 red Sancerre 2.25L BIB sells at £55 (£18.33 per 75cl equivalent), believes more and more high-quality wine sellers will move into alternative formats.

Laylo is another young company trying to challenge the perception that BIBs are about cheap wine (*drinklaylo.com*). Co-founder Laura Riches says of her elegantly designed wine boxes: 'We wanted to overcome the stigma associated with BIBs, so we decided to make ours look nothing like the others. We choose the best wine we can find in each price bracket and our packaging is inspired by where it comes from.' As Jamie Wynne-Griffiths of UK distributor Propeller puts it: 'BIBs are no longer like what your mum had in the fridge 20 years ago.'

'The feedback was unbelievably positive. It's the cutting edge of sustainability'

Jason Haas, Tablas Creek (left) ►



For Rich Hamblin of More Wine (*morewine.co.uk*), who sells wine in BIBs, pouches and cans, ‘the challenge is getting across to people that you can buy quality wine in alternative formats’.

SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Rob Malin of When in Rome (*wheninromewine.com*), whose Italian wines come in several formats, feels each has its specific appeal. ‘BIBs are great, but it’s a lot of wine to buy if you haven’t tried it,’ he says. ‘That’s where cans come in – they’re in small servings, perfect for picnics or festivals.’ In Beaujolais, Anne-Victoire Monrozier produces small batches of her Fleurie in cans (*missvickywine.com*). ‘Perceptions are changing,’ she says. ‘Our customers like the idea of wine in a can they can crack open like a beer but pour like a wine.’

The latest format to emerge is the ‘paper bottle’, with a recycled paperboard shell and inner plastic pouch. Malcolm Waugh of sustainable packaging company Frugalpac believes it offers a ‘revolutionary alternative to glass’ that can be produced more locally, at lower cost, and with a smaller carbon footprint. Malin believes that ‘it can go head-to-head with glass in a way other new forms of packaging can’t, because it looks like a classic bottle and is in the same price bracket’.

Non-glass formats are relatively common in Europe and America, but still hard to find in the UK, where supermarkets remain cautious. ‘We see it as our job to drive this agenda,’ says Barry Dick MW of Waitrose. ‘Customers are very



From left: Theo Gough and Oli Purnell, The Copper Crew

interested in both quality and the environment, but wine is an indulgent emotional purchase and consumers still feel wedded to glass.’ At Marks & Spencer, winemaker Sue Daniels feels ‘we should all be more open-minded about how we drink wine, but we have to bring customers with us’.

Oli Purnell of Copper Crew (*coppercrew.co.uk*), which sells a range of canned South African wines, believes that ‘independent merchants are doing a lot of the work of getting new formats out, which is unfair because supermarkets have much bigger

budgets’. When in Rome’s Malin is frustrated by the pace of change, too: ‘The CO2 level in the atmosphere is increasing and threatening to render our planet uninhabitable. Meanwhile, retailers ask us if we seriously expect consumers to bother separating plastic from cardboard, and I’m saying: yes, that’s exactly what I expect.’

GLASS CEILING

In 2018-2019, the alcohol monopolies of Sweden, Finland and Norway jointly calculated the average CO2 per litre emitted in the manufacture of different forms of wine packaging. The results (*see chart, left*) are striking. Glass bottles have by far the highest carbon impact. The footprint of cans and PET bottles is substantially lower, but it is BIBs, pouches and cartons that have the lowest emissions. The difference is bigger still if you include transportation. Sara Norell of the Swedish monopoly Systembolaget says: ‘BIB was seen as low-quality to begin with. Now it’s 50% of the Swedish market. It’s difficult for us as consumers to change our habits, but we have to consume differently if we want our children to have a liveable planet.’

To be clear, glass bottles currently remain the only viable format for cellaring wines. Wine in BIB, pouch, PET bottle and aluminium can has a limited shelf life (though wines in PET bottles reportedly keep for up to 18 months, and I have tasted canned wines that were still fresh after two years). But most people buy wine for immediate drinking: almost all the wine consumed around the world (some 90%) is drunk within a few weeks of purchase. There is no need for such wines to be packaged in glass bottles. With the energy crisis driving up the cost of manufacturing glass, the



Jessica Julmy, Château Galoupet, Provence (see p73)

economic – as well as environmental – arguments for packaging ‘drink now’ wines in alternative formats are compelling.

Marc Laventure of Canvino, whose canned Italian sparkling wine recently launched in Tesco, feels that ‘wine, unlike spirits, has suffered from a lack of packaging innovation’. Dr Armando Corsi, Associate Professor in Wine Business at the University of Adelaide in South Australia, thinks that ‘things are starting to change, but glass is still king’, and ‘if you ask consumers to choose between glass bottles and other formats, glass largely wins’. Research by Wine Intelligence in the UK suggests far more people (59%) believe glass is a sustainable form of packaging than BIB (37%). ‘For all the excited talk, the glass bottle still rules the wine world by a huge distance,’ says the research company’s co-founder Richard Halstead. ‘Consumers think it’s an environmentally friendly container that’s easy to recycle, even though that’s not true.’

That is partly because, as Jancis Robinson MW has put it, most of us are ‘shockingly ignorant’ about what happens to the packaging we leave out for recycling. Glass and aluminium are both in theory ‘circular’ materials – meaning they can be repeatedly recycled and reused. But recycling rates for glass vary hugely (the UK overall glass recycling rate stood at 72% for 2019, according to industry body FEVE) and glass recycling is

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Ollie Lea, The BIB Wine Co (see p73)

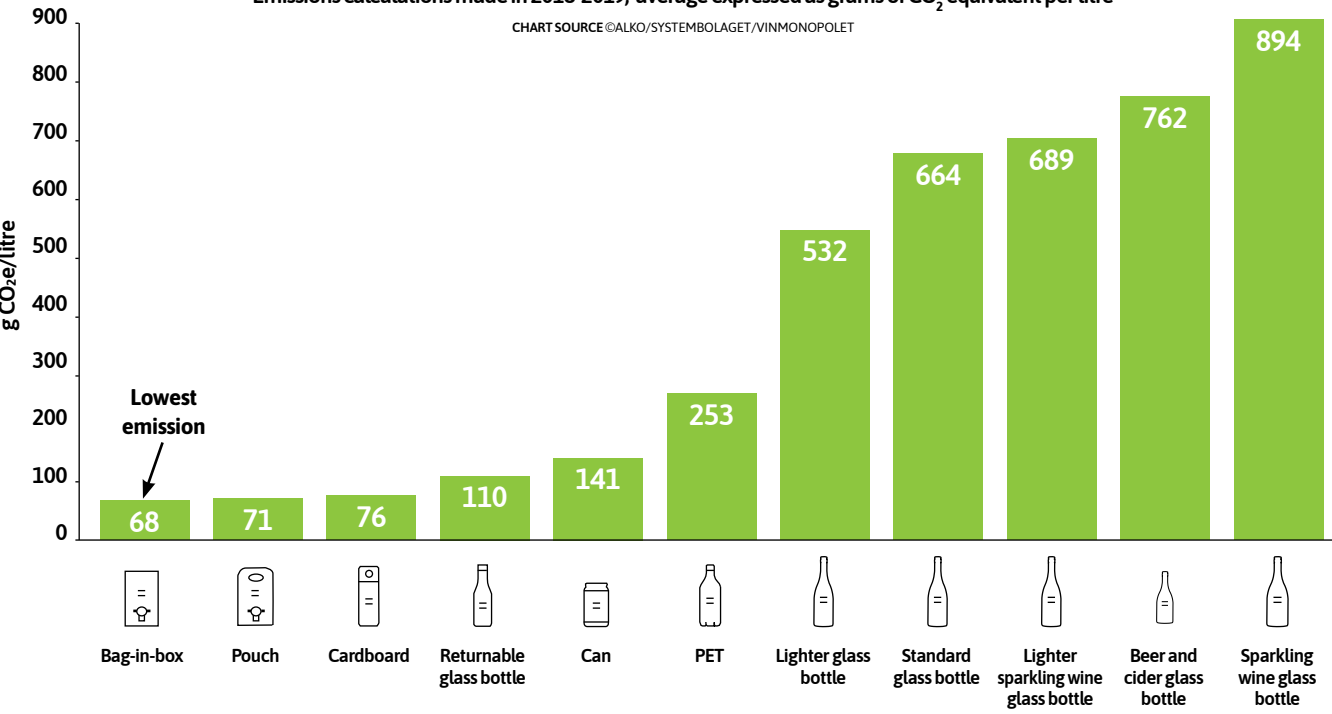
Ô Joie: Beaujolais producer Anne-Victoire Monrozier produces small batches of her Fleurie in cans



Carbon emissions during manufacture of different packaging types

Emissions calculations made in 2018-2019, average expressed as grams of CO₂ equivalent per litre

CHART SOURCE ©ALKO/SYSTEMBOLAGET/VINMONOPOLET



ALTERNATIVES TO GLASS	MATERIAL	CAPACITY	CONSUMPTION	PROS & CONS
Bag-in-box (BIB)	Cardboard box containing a flexible bag made of multiple layers of plastic and sometimes aluminium, which contracts as wine is poured from its plastic tap, preventing air entering.	Generally 2.25-litre or 3L boxes (equivalent to three or four 750ml bottles), but larger 5L or 10L boxes can also be found.	Wine in BIB has a shelf life of 8-10 months. Once open, the wine typically stays fresh for 4-6 weeks.	Lightweight, carbon-efficient to transport and effective at stopping oxidation. But the cardboard box and plastic bag have to be separated for recycling.
Can	Aluminium can, lined on the inside with protective lacquer. Cans are a reductive environment (no or little oxygen) for wine, so acidity and sulphite levels must be carefully managed at production.	Generally sold in portion-sized servings of 200ml, 250ml or 355ml (about a quarter to half of a 750ml bottle).	Wine in cans stays fresh for at least 12 months, and may in some cases keep for longer.	Lightweight and widely recycled. Despite past controversy about resins in the lacquer made from bisphenol A (BPA), the BPA level commonly used in cans is considered safe.
Plastic bottle	Standard or flat bottles made of polyethylene terephthalate (PET).	Generally sold in traditional 750ml bottles, but can also be found in smaller bottle sizes.	Wine in PET bottles has a shelf life of about 18 months.	Lightweight, with a much lower carbon footprint than glass and easier to recycle. Past concerns about oxygen ingress and potential ‘leaching’ of plastic into the wine have been solved by multi-layering the PET with ‘oxygen scavengers’.
Pouch	Made from similar materials to the flexible bag inside a BIB but stouter, with aluminium layering to prevent light spoilage. Works like a BIB.	Usually sold in 1.5L pouches (equivalent to two 750ml bottles) – sometimes known as ‘bagnums’.	Similar shelf life to a BIB. Once open, the wine will keep for about a month	Light, small, easy to carry and fits neatly into most fridges. Requires chemical recycling.
‘Paper bottle’	Essentially a bottle-shaped BIB with a plastic screwcap instead of a tap. But looks like a traditional bottle.	Sold in traditional-sized 750ml bottles.	Prior to opening, wine in ‘paper bottles’ is claimed to have a shelf life of 12 months.	Much lighter than glass bottles but, in retaining the classic bottle shape, less carbon-efficient for transport than BIBs or cartons. Internal stand-up plastic pouch and paper surround must be separated for recycling.
Carton	Often known as Tetra Pak and widely used for milk and fruit juice. Made from cardboard, plastic and aluminium layers.	Sold in different sizes in Europe and America, but not found in the UK.	Prior to opening, wine in carton is claimed to have an 18-month shelf life.	Lightweight and carbon-efficient to transport, but hard to recycle conventionally and suffers from a low-quality image.

carbon-intensive. PET is more carbon-efficient to recycle, but – presumably because the plastic is visible – is a harder sell for wine than formats with plastic interiors.

JUST DO IT

While BIBs and pouches have a much lower carbon footprint, the plastic aluminium laminates (layers sandwiched together) in the bag that holds the liquid cannot be recycled conventionally and must be broken down by a form of chemical recycling called pyrolysis. Several BIB companies, including The BIB Wine Co, Laylo and More Wine, encourage customers to send back the inner bags using pre-paid envelopes for recycling by specialist recyclers such as Enval. ‘At the moment, most flexible packaging in the UK goes into landfill or is

incinerated,’ says the company’s CEO Carlos Ludlow-Palafox. ‘In a few years, everyone will be using chemical recycling.’

‘There’s no perfect sustainable wine packaging,’ says Galoupet’s Julmy. ‘But if you get paralysed trying to find the perfect solution, you’re doing nothing. Our recycled PET bottle is much lighter and much easier to recycle than glass. So I think it’s a pretty good solution for the time being.’

Copper Crew’s Purnell agrees: ‘Every approach to sustainability has its upsides and downsides. It’s no use throwing up our hands and saying we can’t do anything. What matters is to start a process.’ As for Haas at Tablas Creek, he is delighted that the success of his BIB rosé has prompted interest from other California producers: ‘I think we can be the pebble that starts the avalanche.’

Joy’s 20 to try: quality wine in alternative packaging

Mitja Herga, Lot #5 Pinot Blanc, Slovenia 2020 91

£32.99/2.25L BIB Laylo

Per 750ml: £10.99 Slovenian Pinot Blanc blended with a little Furmint. The box design is inspired by Slovenian folk embroidery. Fine lemon sherbet and honeysuckle nose. Rich, rounded, mouthfilling and full of lively citrus notes, with good structure and saline grip. This is lovely. **Alcohol** 12%

Per 750ml: £12.50 Citrus nose, rich and chalky in the mouth, with good grip and a little sweetness. A hedonistic mouthful of petrolly, pineapple fruit. **Alc** 13.5%

Copper Crew, Sauvignon Blanc, Western Cape, South Africa 2020 89

£4.17/250ml can Copper Crew
Per 750ml: £12.50 Quite exotic tropical nose. Fresh and appealing with lime and gooseberry notes in the mouth. Nicely rounded, well-balanced wine with some complexity. **Alc** 13%

Provençal rosé, with a refreshing citric-grapefruit hit. **Alc** 13.5%

Copper Crew, Rosé, Western Cape, South Africa 2020 89

£4.17/250ml can Copper Crew
Per 750ml: £12.50 Quite a full-bodied rosé, a little reductive on the nose when tasted. Well made and full of red, strawberry-dominated fruits, with a little spice. The 2019 is still drinking well, too. **Alc** 13.5%

① La Marina, Cuvée Océane, Côtes de Gascogne, France 2021 90

£26.80/2.25L BIB BIB Wine Co
Per 750ml: £8.93 Blend of Colombard, Sauvignon Blanc and Gros Manseng from southwest France. Engaging gooseberry and tangerine nose. Round and rich in the mouth, with a nice limey grip. Tangy, salty and refreshing. Great value. **Alc** 11%

Domaine of the Bee, Bee Pink, Côtes Catalanes, Roussillon, France 2021 91

£34.80/2.25L BIB BIB Wine Co
Per 750ml: £11.60 From Justin Howard-Sneyd MW’s domaine in France’s far southwest, this is a blend of Grenache Noir, Grenache Gris and Syrah. Very pale pink with a fine, inviting berry nose. Refreshing and elegant rosé, full of lifted strawberry fruit. Absolutely delicious. **Alc** 12.5%

Defy, Organic Rosé Wine, Abruzzo, Italy NV 89

£6.50/250ml can Defy, Brixton Wine Club
Per 750ml: £19.50 An engaging Montepulciano d’Abruzzo rosé, bright garnet in colour with a nose of stewed fruit and boiled sweets. Interesting, juicy fruit mouthful of rhubarb and cloves. **Alc** 13%

② Cantina Goccia, Celi, Umbria, Italy 2020 89

£12.99/750ml paper (2021) Embargo
Mostly Grechetto with Vermentino and Chardonnay. This has a smoky-mineral, grapefruit nose and full, melony fruit in the mouth. Good body, with a salty-savoury quality and attractive sour-bitter apple freshness on the finish. **Alc** 13.5%

④ Château Galoupet, Nomade Rosé, Provence, France 2021 90

£25/75cl PET Clos 19, Millésima
From LVMH’s flagship sustainability project in Provence, a typical blend of southern French grape varieties. Attractive pale pink rosé in a strikingly designed ‘flat’, lightweight PET bottle (said to be just 63g) made from ‘prevented ocean plastic’ cleared from seashores. Classic

Du Grappin, Cinsault Rosé, Côtes du Rhone, France NV 89

£28.50/1.5L pouch More Wine
Per 750ml: £14.25 Characterful Rhône rosé in Andrew and Emma Nielsen’s distinctive ‘bagnum’ pouch. Deep orangey-pink, with a nose of rhubarb and apple. Pleasantly tart, with lively cranberry notes. **Alc** 13%

③ Copper Crew, Chenin Blanc, Western Cape, South Africa 2021 89

£4.17/250ml can Copper Crew

⑤ When in Rome, Rosato, Abruzzo, Italy NV 89

£10.99-£11.95/75cl paper Jaded Palates,
When in Rome
Made by Azienda Agricola Casimirri from

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

a blend of local grapes. Fullish pink in colour with a fresh, rose-petal nose. Tangy and attractive rosé with good acidity and crunchy red fruits. **Alc** 13%

Marks & Spencer, Cuvée Rosée, Coteaux Varois en Provence, France NV 88

£14.50/1.5L pouch Marks & Spencer
Per 750ml: £7.25 Cheerful, refreshing dry rosé blend from Provence. Nose of nectarines and fruit drops. Fresh and tangy, with a salty lick. Nice texture with grippy red fruits and fruit pastille notes in the mouth. Good value. **Alc** 12.50%

The Uncommon, Eleanor Bubbly Rosé, England 2020 88

£4.75/250ml can Fortnum & Mason, Waitrose
Per 750ml: £14.97 Semi-sparkling, pale pink and quirkily labelled off-dry English Pinot Noir sourced from vineyards in Kent and Hampshire. Tangy and fresh, it has hints of rhubarb and strawberries. Delicious for any picnic. **Alc** 11.5%

Domaine Reverdy-Ducroux, Sancerre Rouge, Sancerre, Loire, France 2019 92

£55/2.25L BIB BIB Wine Co
Per 750ml: £18.33 Classy red Sancerre: spicy, elegant Pinot Noir in a box. Medium-bodied in style, with plenty of lively, savoury, raspberry fruit notes, good grip

and structure. This is an elegant and versatile wine, worth the money. **Alc** 13.5%

Miss Vicky, Ô Joie, Fleurie, France 2020 92

£7/250ml can Brixton Wine Club
Per 750ml: £21 Joyful canned Beaujolais cru made at Château des Moriers by Anne-Victoire Monrozier, who has a background in wine innovation. Appealing, Pinot-like cherry scents, followed by a mouthful of bright, crunchy red fruits. Delicious and moreish – a seductive Fleurie in a can. **Alc** 13%

Valerio Marconi, Lot #7 Toscana, Tuscany, Italy 2019 91

£42.99/2.25L BIB Laylo
Per 750ml: £14.33 Sangiovese-Merlot blend from Tuscany, so in effect a 'SuperTuscan' in a box. The box packaging design is taken from a fresco of the Last Judgement on the dome of Florence cathedral. Lovely bright colour and engaging nose. Fresh and full of berry fruit, but quite tannic and serious, with good structure and bite. Excellent food wine. **Alc** 13.5%

Cantina Goccia, 3Q, Umbria, Italy 2018 90

£12.99/750ml paper (2019) Embargo
An unwooded blend of Sangiovese, Cabernet and Merlot from this central region north of Rome. Seductive, suave and

quite elegant, full of fruit with good grip in the mouth. Attractive wine with plenty of substance. **Alc** 14%

⑥ Defy, Organic Red Wine, Abruzzo, Italy NV 90

£6.50/250ml can Defy, Brixton Wine Club
Per 750ml: £19.50 Full-bodied, spicy, herby red made from Montepulciano d'Abruzzo. A rich and seductive wine that shows rounded tannins and plenty of dark, plummy fruits. **Alc** 13.5%

Fishwives Club, Magical Merlot, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2019 90

£6.50/250ml can (2021) Embargo
Per 750ml: £19.50 With a quirky design on the can, this is a plump, appealing Merlot. The honeybush plant has been used as a natural antioxidant instead of sulphites. Deep red with a fresh, enticing oaky nose. Lots of dusty, plummy fruit. **Alc** 14.5%

⑦ Waitrose, Terre di Fiano Organic Rosso, Puglia, Italy 2019 89

£25.99/2.25L tube Waitrose
Per 750ml: £8.67 Waitrose's wine 'tube' – essentially a BIB in tube format, but with an additional metal lid that makes it more complicated to recycle. A blend of Negroamaro, Cabernet Sauvignon and Primitivo. Spicy, vanilla-oaky nose. Soft, attractive mouthful of red fruits. A bit heavy on the oak, but good value. **Alc** 13.5% **D**



PHOTOGRAPH KEITH HEPPELL/CAMBRIDGE INDEPENDENT