

# GRAPEVINE

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## Tapping the Potential of Keg Wine

Imagine ordering a glass of wine and having it served at the perfect temperature and tasting fresh every time. "That's what [wine on tap] is all about: delivering a better glass," says Jordan Kivelstadt, CEO and co-founder of Napa-based Free Flow Wines, a kegging service provider.

Thanks to enthusiasm from wineries and growing interest from restaurants, more than 3,900 locations in 49 states now offer wine on tap, nearly double the number of locations from two years ago. "What started as a cool curiosity is now a central piece of how restaurants are built out," says Jason Haas, partner and general manager of Tablas Creek Vineyard in Paso Robles. "It was novelty in the beginning but is increasingly how a large number of top restaurants are choosing to source their by-the-glass wines."

Free Flow works with 250 wine brands from all over the world, cranking out 250,000 kegs per year. Premium clients such as Napa Valley's Hall Wines, Sonoma's Chateau St. Jean and Oregon's Chehalem have wine in kegs at a range of venues, including Kimpton and Marriott hotels, Pebble Beach Resorts and P.F. Chang's.

New Jersey-based Gotham Project is another large supplier, offering a mix of its own and third-party brands. Founded in 2010, the firm initially specialized in New York Finger Lakes wines but quickly expanded to produce or source wine for its own proprietary labels, including imported wine. "We pioneered the import side of the business," says co-founder Bruce Schneider.

The biggest problem associated with wine by the glass is freshness: Open a bottle to serve one customer and you're not sure you'll sell the other five glasses before oxygen kills the wine. Wine on tap stays fresh longer. Each 19.5-liter stainless-steel reusable keg holds the equivalent of 26 bottles of wine. Once it's tapped, an inert gas protects the wine from oxygen, keeping it fresh for up to three months, according to both Free Flow and several restaurateurs interviewed by *Wine Spectator*.

Wendy Heilmann, director of wine and spirits at Pebble Beach Resorts in California, developed a special keg cellar at the group's Inn at Spanish Bay location, which she calls "the hub," where kegs of red and



Above: Free Flow Wines co-founders Jordan Kivelstadt and Dan Donahoe pose with a kegging machine at their Napa plant. Below: A bartender pours a Gotham Project wine at New York's Upland restaurant; wine on tap requires a custom setup.



### SELECTED WINES AVAILABLE ON TAP

	WS SCORE
Dry Creek Vineyards Zinfandel Sonoma County Heritage Vines 2013	90
Round Pond Estate Sauvignon Blanc Rutherford 2014	90
Tablas Creek Patelin de Tablas Blanc 2014	90
Acrobat Pinot Noir Oregon 2013	88
Macrosteie Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2013	88
14 Hands Chardonnay Washington 2013	87
Hall Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley 2014	87

white wines feed the taps for three bars at the property. She estimates that given a 5 percent spoil rate for bottles in by-the-glass programs, wine on tap saves her restaurants about \$35,000 to \$40,000 annually.

Because of this durability, restaurants are willing to offer higher-priced wines by the glass in keg format. This arrangement is good for vintners, as customers unwilling to buy an unfamiliar bottle can try a glass.

Challenges still exist. Keg wine remains a niche market, concentrated in large cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. Typically, only new restaurants that can outfit their space for wine on tap have developed programs: You can't just connect a wine keg to a beer tap.

Kivelstadt says that only 0.5 percent of all on-premise wine is currently sold on tap. His goal: Reach 10 percent in 10 years. That will require a lot of thirsty customers.

—Aaron Romano

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