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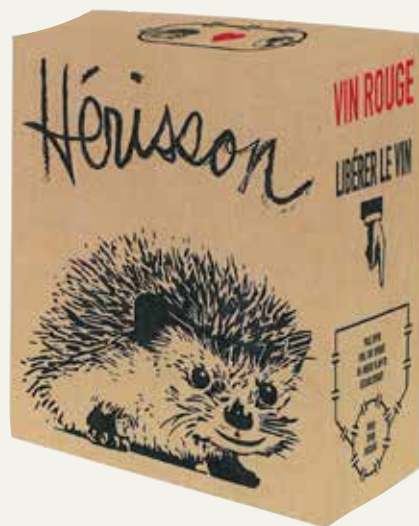
MORGAN STANLEY



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The New Box Scores

If you haven't tasted boxed wines in a while, prepare to be blown away by the quality—and deliciousness—of the new wave.

BY ANTHONY GIGLIO

IF YOU ARE OF A CERTAIN AGE—meaning you remember *Dynasty*, the prime-time ABC soap opera from the 1980s—you surely remember boxed wines. The most famous was—and debatably remains—Franzia, the California winery that made zillions with its iconic five-liter bag-in-a-box wines. Yet despite the success and logic behind these ultra-portable, economical, planet-friendly packages, the boxed wine category remains for many a symbol of high-quantity, low-quality wine, and that's a shame, because they've come a long way since the Reagan presidency.

Today's "it" brands, such as Bandit, From the Tank, and Volpina, have plenty to say about why all of us should be discovering—or revisiting—boxed wines. When Melissa Saunders founded Communal Brands in 2009, sustainability was her focus. Initially, she curated a collection of winemakers concerned about the environment, but she realized that packaging—heavy glass bottles—had the greatest impact on the planet. That's what drew her to boxed wines. "The challenge is how to get the buyers to believe me that wine in a box doesn't have to be cheap and crappy," says Saunders. She started by putting reasonable wine in that format. Then she pointed out the savings: One of her three-liter boxes priced at \$40 equals four 750-milliliter bottles at around \$20 each. "You get twice the quantity of wine for the money."

The hipster packaging of boxed wines—like the bold yellow cube of Schplink! Grüner Veltliner from Austria, the hedgehog-adorned Hérisson Vin Rouge (a Passe-Tout-Grains Pinot Noir/Gamay blend from Burgundy, France), or the she-fox-bearing Volpina Sangiovese (from Tuscany)—comes from Communal Brands, which delivers in flavor as well. And Saunders is just getting started. "I'm launching a Malbec from Cahors, France, called Cedric, and I'm also playing with 1.5-liter 'Bagnums'—1.5-liter magnums in a bag—called Vagabonde Côtes du Rhône."

For Jenny Lefcourt, co-founder of Jenny & François Selections, an importer of natural wines (which she defines as "low-tech or no-tech"), her boxed wine epiphany came while traveling in southern France: "I was fascinated to see locals coming to

wineries to pick up wine for the week in a jug, and it occurred to me that you could put a great wine in a box and ship it with less carbon footprint than shipping a heavy glass bottle with a label and cork that were also produced separately." Don't let the unassuming packaging of her From the Tank fool you: All three offerings overdeliver. From the Tank White is a crispy, oak-free Chardonnay; From the Tank Rosé is a tangy blend of Grenache and Cinsault; and From the Tank Red is a Rhône-lover's blend of Grenache, Syrah, Carignan, and Mourvèdre.

Bandit Wines might be the smallest of the boxed wines at your retailer, but among climate-conscious producers, the team behind it might be among the issue's biggest proponents. When Charles Bieler, Joel Gott, and Roger Scommegna founded Three Thieves in 2003, they started selling small-lot wines in one-liter jugs that they'd allocate to fine wine shops. "It was a riot," says Bieler. "Traditionalists were offended, but others loved them." That same year, Scommegna, while in Italy, noticed stacks of wine in Tetra Pak boxes in the grocery stores. Research showed that it was a big part of Italian grocery wine sales, it protected wine beautifully, and the packaging cost less than a wine cork. "As a lightweight, paper-based container, it had a far lower carbon footprint than glass," says Bieler. Wine in Tetra Paks didn't exist in the United States then, and Three Thieves wanted to be the first. As Bieler explains it, "It took a good 10 years for U.S. grocery chains to carve out space, but now there's not a mainstream wine shop that wouldn't offer at least a few wines in Tetra." Bandit comes in seven delicious styles: Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Dry Rosé, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and a juicy Red Blend.

While smaller boxed wines like Bandit should and could be consumed within a couple of days after opening them, the bigger bag-in-a-box wines last a lot longer. "You do want to consume it within 12 months of purchase," advises Saunders. "I should point out that once you tap the bag, it lets the wine out but keeps the air out, too. So it's good for a month—a bottle a week!"