

## BOXED WINES: WHY NOT?

Wine casks suit summer in the outdoors

By Jessica Yadegaran  
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On a recent camping trip to Stinson Beach, I realized how cumbersome the wine life can be. I'd traveled light, but my bottles were weighing me down. There's just something about thick glass that doesn't do well in dirt or sand, let alone on five-mile hikes.

Alas, it was the perfect opportunity to enjoy the onslaught of premium boxed wines currently on the market. I prefer the Australian term, casks, for these square offerings, even though they don't resemble casks in the slightest. But the Aussies know what they're doing: 50 percent of all wine sold in Oz comes out of a box.

And why not? Boxed wines are shatter-free and perfect for picnics and poolsides. And they are guaranteed value, especially in these economic tough times. For \$15 to \$25, you get three liters at a carbon footprint that is 55 percent smaller than the four bottles it replaces, and the wine lasts for at least one month, as opposed to one day, because it is sealed inside an oxygen-tight pouch. So it makes sense that sales of premium boxed wines have increased by 75 percent in recent years.

But how do they taste? Pretty darn good. When choosing one, make sure you go with a recent vintage (these wines are not meant for aging) and reliable producer that sources grapes from a reputable region. Non-vintage blends work, too, as long as you know you're getting a Central Coast Chardonnay or a Shiraz from southeastern Australia.

Here are five of my favorite boxed wines, just in time for your August barbecues, picnics and beach trips. It's too late for me, but if you hit the camping trail, remember: You can take the wine pouch out of the box and carry it in your backpack. Puncture. Squirt. Savor.

- Boho Vineyards Chardonnay: This Central Coast Chardonnay is medium in body with tropical aromas of pineapple and coconut and a toasty vanilla flavor. Around \$20. Try it with herb roasted chicken salad.
- Black Box Cabernet Sauvignon: This Paso Robles Cab hides its size with a smooth and easy finish. It begins with aromas of blackberry and ripe olives and ends on chocolate-covered cherries. Tannins are chewy, so slap this against a flank steak sandwich. About \$20.
- Wine Cube Pinot Grigio: Target's boxed wines are great with food, especially this crisp Pinot Grigio. It's got aromas and flavors of lemon followed by honeydew and peach. \$16.
- Le Cask Old Vine Zinfandel: From Lodi comes this Zinfandel, with its blackberry, vanilla, chocolate and subtle spicy flavors. This is ribs wine. About \$25.
- Three Thieves Bandit Merlot: Joel Gott and his fellow Thieves continue to impress with their one-liter Tetra Pak cartons. This velvety Merlot is delightful with barbecued pork, as it has rich aromas and flavors of plum and herbs. \$7.99.