



De Bortoli: Going green

Head of the glass: how the wine industry is making bottling more sustainable

Consumers are increasingly aware of ethically conscious winemaking. But how much do they know about the sustainability of the bottle?

The world's most inventive winemakers are pioneering lightweight alternatives that preserve wine quality, including characteristics such as balance, acidity and finish. Photograph: heshphoto/Getty Images/Cultura RF

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De BORTOLI

FAMILY WINEMAKERS

17 TREES

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In the past few years, vegan-friendly, organic and natural wines have become a growing fixture of the wine industry. It's the logical consequence of the increasing number of consumers who are driven to make ethical food and drink choices.

But fewer oenophiles are aware that these sustainability credentials aren't limited to the techniques that give rise to their favourite minimal-intervention pinot noir alone.

The wine bottle as we know it has been a mainstay of culture since the 17th century, when the invention of the coal furnace gave rise to thick, harder-to-break glass that allowed wine to be transported safely, could be better for the environment. An April 2020 report by the [Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation](#) estimates that a mere 5% reduction in materials could save 250,000 tonnes of packaging and spark further ecological outcomes over a product's life cycle.

Now, the world's most inventive winemakers are pioneering lightweight alternatives that preserve wine quality, including characteristics such as flavour , acidity and finish. Through this process – sometimes known as light-weighting – they're also keeping their environmental footprints as low as possible.

Rob Glastonbury, the Head of operations at De Bortoli Wines, understands how something as simple as a wine bottle can become a symbol of environmental awareness. In 2009, De Bortoli was an early adopter when Australian glass manufacturers began experimenting with lightweighting. By 2011, more than 60% of its bottles were lightweight glass.

"De Bortoli Wines were early adopters of lightweight bottles," Glastonbury says.

The move, part of De Bortoli's ambitions of becoming a zero-waste wine company, is part of a wave of disruption that aims to make the wine world more sustainable – both today and in years to come.

Glastonbury says lightweight glass bottles only weigh between 360 and 380 grams, making them nearly 100 grams lighter than standard bottles but equally durable.

Lightweight bottles, Glastonbury says, are as strong as their traditional counterparts.

"You've got a lot less material," he says, adding that there's no difference between lightweight and standard glass bottles when it comes to preserving the quality and taste of wine. "The manufacturers use a specific technique to get [liquid glass] evenly into a mould. They blow [it] into shape and achieve an even distribution that's a very similar strength to a heavyweight bottle."

Lightweight alternatives are also far better for the environment. Like heavyweight bottles, they can be recycled, but they also demand less energy and can dramatically improve transport efficiency – especially at high volumes and over long distances.

"You've got a much, much lower footprint in terms of the energy-intensive, raw materials," Glastonbury says. "And once you get into the final product, in terms of carton weight, it means a carton of lightweight bottles is almost a kilogram to a kilogram-and-a-half lighter than the standard carton. If there are 1,000 cartons in the container, that's a tonne of difference. It adds up pretty quickly."

These days, "green" has become a buzzword, but for Glastonbury, "you should only claim what you can audit".

"We are always developing new products with a focus on sustainability," he says. "From bottles and caps to labels, inks and packaging. We self-assess during the process, to make sure we are always trying to improve."



A good example of this is De Bortoli's new [17 Trees](#) range, which includes three sustainably produced, vegan-friendly wines: a shiraz, a chardonnay and a pinot grigio.

The line is packaged in lightweight glass bottles and features labels made from fibre-based pulp created from sugarcane waste. One tree is planted for every six bottles sold.

The 17 Trees label is just the latest example of De Bortoli's long history of sustainable innovation. Over the past 12 years, the company has invested nearly \$12m in environmental research, development, and environmental initiatives, and in 2016 was awarded the NSW Government Sustainability Advantage program's first Platinum Project certificate.

Staying abreast of sustainability issues calls for an ongoing commitment to experimentation. Although some wine companies are rolling out recycled PET bottles, Glastonbury is more excited about the possibilities offered by materials that are still being researched – such as plant-based plastics. It's part of the company's dedication to staying abreast of the wine industry's new frontiers.

"There's a lot of research and innovation happening in that area at the moment and we're always trying to adapt and take advantage of what we can when it is available," he says.

[Find out more on De Bortoli Wines' commitment to sustainability.](#)

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