



DITCH THOSE HEAVY BOTTLES

BY TINA CAPUTO

Several years ago, just as I thought the ultra-heavy bottle trend was on its way out, I received a sample of high-end Zinfandel from a Sonoma County winery. As I hoisted the bottle from its shipping box, I realized that it was easily the heaviest bottle of wine I'd ever encountered. Just to be sure, I weighed it on a postage meter. The verdict: 4.5 pounds—a whopper, considering that a standard full bottle of wine usually clocks in at less than 3 pounds.

What's the reason behind such massive bottles? It's simple: Some people equate them with expensive (and therefore great) wine, thinking that the wineries wouldn't spend the money to package a crappy wine in such a nice container. But that's not necessarily true. Pricey packaging is not a guarantee of wine quality. In fact, it might even be trying to compensate for something, like a guy driving a conspicuously expensive sports car.

While heavy bottles may be aesthetically impressive, they've developed a reputation for being environmentally reckless. How are the beefy bottles eco-unfriendly? Let us count the ways:

1. More raw materials and energy are needed to make them.
2. The bottles produce more glass waste.
3. Because of the added weight, they require more fuel to transport them to their destinations – from the bottle production facility to the winery; from the winery to the distributor; from the distributor to the retailer; from the retailer to the consumer's home.

4. The increased girth of heavy bottles means fewer bottles will fit in a truck. That means more trucks on the road, using even more fuel.

I've heard plenty of complaints about oversized bottles from fellow wine writers, who—like me—feel that they fly in face of environmental responsibility and sustainability. A decade ago, UK wine writer Jancis Robinson launched a “name and shame” campaign on her website to call out vintners who packaged their wines in ridiculously heavy bottles. More recently, *New York Times* wine columnist Eric Asimov pointed the finger at heavy bottles as contributors to climate change.

For a while there it seemed like wineries were listening. Not long after I received that impossibly heavy bottle of Zin, glass companies got into a sort of arms race to see who could create the lightest-weight wine bottle, and wineries sent out press releases bragging about their featherweight, puntless vessels. But after a few years, the trend fizzled out. Wineries went back to their muscle-busting bottles, and it was as if the “lite” versions never existed.

This was confirmed by a recent article in *Spirited* magazine, a publication for drinks professionals, which trumpeted “premiumization” as the latest trend in wine bottles.

Today's wineries want their packaging to exude quality—and there's nothing that says quality like a heavy-ass bottle. Ironically, many of the wineries embracing this trend are the same ones that tout their use of sustainable farming and business practices. It's time to stop the madness. As long as consumers continue to buy wines in those five-pound bottles without uttering a word of complaint, vintners will keep right on using them. But if wine drinkers who care about the planet speak up, the offending producers might just change their ways.

Lighter-weight bottles may not be as sexy from an aesthetic standpoint, but is that extra heft really worth the additional cost to the environment -- and to your wallet, in subsidizing the more-expensive packaging? Wine bottles are for holding fermented grape juice, not for bench pressing.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tina Caputo is a writer based in Northern California who covers wine, beer, food, and travel. Formerly the editor-in-chief of *Vineyard & Winery Management* magazine, her work has appeared in *Wine Enthusiast*, *SevenFifty Daily*, *Spirited*, *Visit California*, *Sonoma* magazine, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and many other publications. She also produces the podcast “Winemakers Drinking Beer.”

