

Face Off: Boxed wine whiners

Boxed wine is fruity goodness endorsed by the Romans

Mike Guidice

The Clackamas Print

Affordable, storable and unbreakable. What could I possibly be referring to?

It can only be one thing – boxed wine, of course – the official drink of cheap champions (or the perpetually broke wine connoisseur).

Growing up in a predominantly Italian family, it was not unusual to encounter a lot of alcohol around the house. One particular constant was wine.

At times, the wine was in a plastic bag, encased in a cardboard box. This concept boggled my mind at first; I'm not gonna lie. It went against all conventional wisdom, and I felt like, since God turned water into wine, He would not approve of wine being converted back to colored water.

However, I quickly began to not only understand, but appreciate the genius creation.

In the evening, I found myself rummaging through the fridge, looking for the peanut butter and/or pickles and ending up face-to-face with a big box of Franzia. I could generally conclude one of two things: It was a good day, and my parents were going to celebrate by sharing a box. If that wasn't the case, then surely the everyday strife of life had them down, and this was how it was to be dealt with: a beautiful box of liquid love.

I myself didn't experience drinkage from the Pandora's box until recently. I was at a dive bar in Oregon City when I saw a sign advertising wine for \$2 a glass. This seemed too good to be true, so I inquired about what this deal truly entailed. My friends dared me to order a glass after the waitress told me it was from a box. She brought me my drink – a small, dirty, plastic wine glass, full to the top. I drank it and was pleased.

Other than the obvious frugality of the beverage, something else that appeals to me is that it goes down easily, which

is something I cannot say about a lot of wine. Even if it may just be an undeveloped pallet, I'll take advantage of the scenario.

Recently there have been whisperings of more affluent, higher quality wine being converted to boxed wine. This hurts my soul just a little. It would defeat the whole purpose of purchasing wine enclosed inside a bag and a box. What are they thinking?

The early Romans would have loved boxed wine had it been available to them so many centuries ago. They could have stored copious amounts by simply stacking boxes on top of one another and building great walls of wine.

Granted, boxed wine doesn't have the shelf-life of wine contained by glass, but who actually has boxed wine around for more than a day or two? Clearly, this is not a problem.

You also don't have to worry about cork taint or, perhaps even worse, bits of the cork (if not the entire cork itself) falling into the bottle upon trying to open it. Perhaps this has only happened to me, though I'm not too sure.

The moral of this story is simple: "When the world seems to shine like you've had too much (boxed) wine, that's amore."

Sorry, Dino, not everyone can afford to wine and dine in Napoli. Salud!

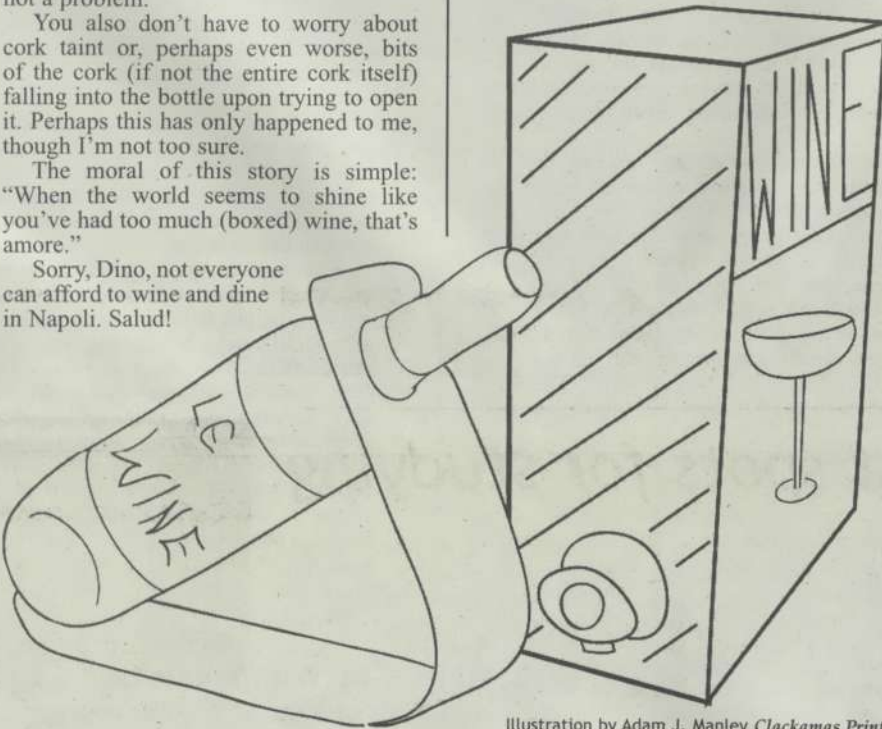


Illustration by Adam J. Manley Clackamas Print

Wine culture under attack by 'bum-boxes,' winos

Matthew Olson

Commentary Editor

Wine is a living thing; it breathes, changes and grows old.

One of the most celebrated things about wine is its ability to age well. Stored in a dark, cool cellar, it will stand the test of time and come out the other side better than before. Maybe that's why so many people are fascinated and entranced by it, and why there's such a large culture surrounding every aspect of the drink.

Relatively recently in the history of wine, many changes have occurred with its process and storage. Advanced fermentation processes and climate-controlled cellars have become possible, all of which are

great advances to the quality of wine.

One advancement that has not proven so beneficial is boxed wine.

Boxed wine is simply an invention that attracts ignorant consumers to cheap wine. While I do recognize that there is a market for cheap wines, I do not encourage it. Why drink cheap Merlot that tastes like vinegar when you can have a full-flavored Pinot Noir?

The real tragedy of this invention is its inability to age. The bag that the wine comes in is not hermetically sealed, so it has the same shelf-life as that of an already-opened bottle of wine. Although most wine is not meant to age more than a year, the best of the best is designed to age decades.

The reason why wine ages well is because of its tannin, or the bits of random matter that is in the wine. Over time, these bits of grape skin, stems and pips add flavor and body. With boxed wine, the tannin doesn't have time to mature, and if any tannin is present, it tastes bitter and ruins the flavor.

Plus, one of the most celebrated parts of a dining experience is the presentation of the wine. The server will bring out the bottle, present it to the diner, pop the cork and let the head of the table take the first taste. If the wine passes muster, then it's fit to be served.

This simply can't happen with a cheap box of wine. Who's going to go to a restaurant and order a gallon of wine, have the server lug it out, pop the corrugated cardboard flap, pull out the bag and squeeze out the first glass of swill for tasting? It just isn't the same; it ruins the culture of it.

Yes, boxed wine is cheap, and yes, it's easy to store, but so is a case of beer. If you want to really appreciate wine, you have to understand that it's not about frugality or ease of storage.

Wine is about history and appreciation. Wine is about full flavor. Wine is purer than water, safer than milk, milder than soda, gentler than booze and more varied than beer. Wine is about the experience and the flavor, not about getting drunk.

Higher education sinks, lawmakers stay high and dry

Frank Jordan

The Clackamas Print

Well, the Oregon Legislature has done it again: cut down the funding that community colleges receive in order to save K-12 education.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski has proposed in his version of the 2007-09 budget that higher education receive \$521 million for the biennium, but the legislature slashed that figure

down to \$480 million.

What are we to make of this? For one thing, state lawmakers really don't care about college students; they figure that if state schools need more money, they can just raise tuition. Those schools have raised tuition and fees so much in the last 10 years that our best and brightest high school students are not seeking higher education in Oregon. They just can't afford it.

Granted, K-12 education is prob-

ably the single most important expenditure that the state faces. With our antiquated tax system, the state and its lawmakers are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. With other needs taking more and more tax dollars (social services, corrections, state police, etc.), our children and their basic education are more dependent than ever on the state.

This tends to leave higher education to fend for itself. And it is not just students who consistently get

the shaft. The buildings and other facilities at our community colleges and universities are falling down all around us.

The governor proposed spending upwards of \$400 million in facility and capital improvements at the higher education level. The legislature slashed that amount to just over \$40 million. They say there just are other priorities at this time.

Not to tell our elected officials how to do their job, but if they choose

not to save higher education now and put it off till later, they may be digging their own grave. The best and brightest of our youngsters, and for that matter, our adult education populace, are continually seeking other opportunities for higher learning in other states.

Oregon just is not cutting it as far as higher education goes. A brain drain is occurring right before our very eyes, and the state just does not seem to care.

How to survive getting lost: You might need directions

Andrea Simpson

The Clackamas Print

In the woods, in the car, on an island – there are many places and ways you can get lost.

But lucky for you, I have compiled a survival guide for getting lost anywhere.

If you are driving and happen to get lost, you could always pull over and ask for directions – but if you are filled with pride and testosterone, you have other options. You could find a phonebook and see if it contains maps, or go to

the nearest gas station and buy one, making the excuse that you tore your other one while doing something manly.

If you are strolling about the woods, for whatever reason, and get lost, don't despair. It is a good idea to keep a compass on you at all times. When you start out on your trek, check the compass to see which direction you are heading so that you know how to get back. If you wait until you are lost, you can find out which direction is north, but you will have no clue which way you came from.

If you don't carry a compass,

there are other ways to distinguish your direction. A common misconception is that moss grows on the north side of trees. This varies depending on where you are. In the Pacific Northwest, moss grows on all sides of trees. Instead, plant a stick into flat ground and mark the top of the shadow. Wait awhile and mark the shadow again. The shadow will always move from east to west.

You can always fall back on the good, old North Star. If you know how to locate the North Star, this can be very effective in giving you a general idea of directions.

However, make sure you know it's the North Star and not just some random star.

If you get lost when your plane crashes on an island with polar bears and Others, you are dreaming. Wake up.

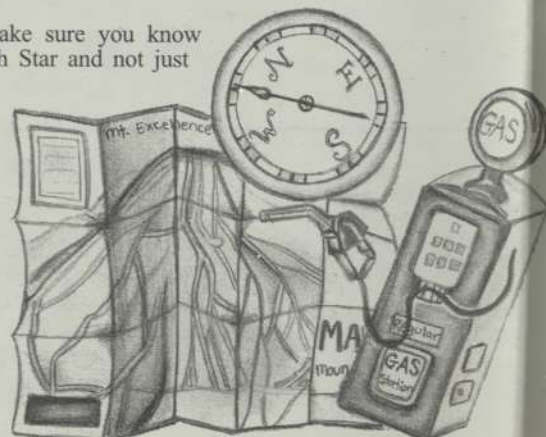


Illustration by Andrea Simpson Clackamas Print