

Snow on Wine

By Dr. Jeff Snow
SEPTEMBER 2021



YOU CAN CAN WINE

We've all seen it haven't we? The gradual appearance of canned wine in grocery store wine sections. And haven't you wondered what that wine was like and who the poor people were who had to drink canned wine? Recently an epiphany came upon me and after that, it was reinforced. **Here is the story.** On our return flight from Palm Springs on April 19th Julie and I were on Alaska seated in Row 2 (yeah, we do fly first class), and I'm offered Chardonnay in a tiny screw top bottle, or "Broken Earth" red blend in a can. I opted for the Chardonnay – not my style, way too oaky. So traded it for the can of red. Popped it open and poured it into a glass (all right, it was plastic, even in first class). I'm really expecting the worst, but it was really **delightful!** Just to be sure, I ordered another can and Julie sipped it as well. A very pleasant wine, went well with whatever the 1st class meal was, (and it is great that Alaska is serving food and wine again for sure.) Reinforcement came when signing-up for the WSU "Feast of the Arts" event which includes a gourmet dinner by the School of Hotel Management. I noted that one of the four featured wineries was "Goose Ridge," which is also canning their wine. So apparently canned wine has arrived beyond grocery store shelves.

WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE DON'T KNOW! If we, the Spokane Enological Society, are the leaders in teaching about wine and food, shouldn't we actually present it to our membership in a way they can compare it to bottled wine, and decide if it belongs on their tables? When asked about canned wine we must have a better answer than "*we don't know!*" But we don't, do we? So I say, **let's find out!**

As an initial scouting expedition Julie and I went to a local grocery and found a dozen canned wines¹. Most are in a 375 ml cans which is half of a standard 750 ml bottle, and while walking to the car it was clear that ten cans weighs a lot less than 5 bottles of wine. For the outdoors type, backpacking to a remote location, or doing a several day river rafting trip, less weight is a real advantage. And for airlines, weight is clearly a factor, and in distribution and shipping as well. And the energy conservation theme continues in the lower carbon footprint for aluminum manufacture and recycling compared to glass. This whole theme is captured on the back label of Underwood Pinot Gris: "*Congratulations! By purchasing Underwood wine, you have unlocked a superpower and are now a force of nature. You have joined us in our commitment to protecting our oceans, lakes, rivers and streams. Yep, you did that. Thank you. If mother Earth drank wine it would be from a can.*"



Another way to think of canned wine is as an alternative to other popular closures such as natural cork, artificial cork, or kelvin screw tops. Over the last several years SES members have learned a lot about the relative advantages and disadvantages of these choices, and screw top closure have become a well-accepted closure type in our tastings. So how would canning compare? Of course cork taint would never occur.

And unlike cork or screw top closures, canning is a complete seal, which precludes any contamination or gas exchange; so wine will not oxidize or turn to vinegar. But there is no expectation of wine improving with age or “maturing.” Most of the cans had no vintage date suggesting producers expect no year-to-year carry over. It is then a great closure for wine intended for immediate consumption. Another related advantage is that cans chill much quicker than bottles in the fridge.

What about the quality of canned wine? My brief experience is that it is like a Clint Eastwood western – The Good, the Bad and the Ugly! But probably never “the great,” as those wines will continue to be packaged for cellar aging in bottles (with either screw top or cork closure). The only way to know is to buy and try. Since many of these canned wines are also available in the bottle, it is my humble suggestion that SES present several with the bottled and canned version side by side, and let members taste for themselves.

A couple of surprises from our grocery store foray: 1) the 14 Hands red blend “Hot to Trot” was a pleasant surprise; 2) the Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough, NZ was a bit disappointing but not really bad; and 3) the Sawtooth Rose’ American wine, Walla Walla, was nice, slightly crisp with soft fruit flavors and excellent with seared Ahi with salsa.

Has the time for canned wine arrived? It does offer clear advantages in reduced weight and lower carbon footprint. And for early drinking it offers to deliver wine just as it “left the winery,” although without any possibility for improvement with age. It can be chilled quickly and stored conveniently (even in Julie’s purse).

So, within its limitations, I think you CAN CAN wine, and you CAN CAN enjoy it! And I think we SHOULD SHOULD un-can some at one of our Tastings to help form our own unbiased tasting judgements.

Footnotes:

- 1) Cupcake, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, NZ., NV
- 2) Kim Crawford, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, NZ, 2019
- 3) Dark Horse, Sauvignon Blanc, California, NV (compare to bottled Dark Horse, Sauvignon Blanc, California, 2019)
- 4) Underwood, Pinot Gris, Oregon (Union Wine Co.)
- 5) House Wine, Red wine Blend, Chile, NV
- 6) House Wine, American Rose’ Wine, Walla Walla, NV
- 7) 14 Hands, Rose’, Columbia Valley, NV
- 8) Sawtooth, Rose’, American Wine, Walla Walla, NV
- 9) Bernard Griffin, Rose’, Columbia Valley, NV
- 10) 14 Hands, Red Blend, “Hot to Trot”, NV

