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Breaking traditions with plastic wine bottles



Tradition dies hard in the French Pyrenees, but winegrowers are struggling as the Gallic pride to bottle their wine in plastic to meet a demand for lighter, unbreakable bottles.

CULTURE **Suzanne Mustacich**
MP - Tradition dies hard in the French Pyrenees, but winegrowers are struggling as the Gallic pride to bottle their wine in plastic to meet a demand for lighter, unbreakable bottles. "Plastic bottles are difficult for me," said Pascal Fernandez, a winegrower from the Papeete cooperative in the Languedoc. "In the French culture, a glass bottle with a natural cork is engrained in our genes."

But Fernandez and the 16 other growers who recently gathered at a local bottler and producer, Les Coteaux Jean d'Albert, say they must overcome cultural taboos and adapt to new consumer demands if they are to survive. "We've had a crisis for the last seven or eight years. Prices dropped every year until they hit 2004 prices. It's a little better now but I don't know if it'll last," Fernandez said.

Many in his region have already given up - "they've tipped up 15,000 hectares (37,000 acres) of vines in the Aude," said Fernandez - and without a turnaround, the long-term outlook does not look good. "There are only two winegrowers under 35," said Fernandez, gesturing to the group, which cultivates 500 hectares (1,250 acres) of sustainably farmed vines.

In fact, none of the winegrowers encouraged their children to follow in their footsteps. It's too difficult, said several growers. So it's understandable these winegrowers learned when one of their top clients, Robert Joseph of Hugh Kevin & Robert, proposed bottling their Green Planet wine in plastic, with an initial order of 75,000 bottles for Asda, the British subsidiary of the mammoth US discount retailer Walmart.

"A lot of the wine trade is a one-night stand relationship," said Robert Joseph of his company's collaborative, demand-driven project. "We are trying to create an enduring relationship - consumer to distributor to producer to growers."

Joseph and analysts at EuroMonitor International say the move to plastic has been driven by demand from buyers as varied as airlines, Texas supermarkets, Nordic and Canadian state liquor monopolies and restaurant chains in Britain. "We are in the most brutally capitalistic part of the wine business. We've seen the wine," said Joseph of his company. "We are a clear believer of what the market wants."

And what a growing number of pragmatic buyers seem to want are unbreakable, easily recycled, lighter wine bottles. "We are expecting positive sales over the following weeks,

especially as we head towards the summer months and there are more occasions such as outdoor festivals and concerts, where traditional glass wine bottles are banned", said Lotte Parsons, spokesperson for Asda.

Distributors and retailers are particularly keen on plastic bottles - known in the trade as PET bottles, after the acronym for the material from which they are moulded - because they lighten the carbon footprint from freight, weighing three to five times less per shipping container, according to Philippe Laurent, president of Les Coteaux Jean d'Albert.

The price of the bottle remains the same, however, so producers don't cut costs. Laurent says his firm expects to supply Asda with 300,000 bottles of wine in plastic bottles this year. He also has an order for over 150,000 bottles of wine-to-PET for the French state liquor monopoly. "It's a good sign - it's taking off," said Laurent.

Other wine producers in the Languedoc defied the trend. "PET bottles are interesting for wines that are affordable and accessible for all consumers, like our varietal wines Coteaux du Sud", said Franck Astaud, chief executive of Sialh, whose production of PET bottled wine shot from zero in 2009 to 2.5 million bottles in 2010. Christine Cornil, export manager for another large Languedoc producer, Sogrape Burziois, said they delivered 20,000 plastic bottles of My PET Wine to the United States in January and will launch another PET bottled wine in Britain this spring.

Domestic sales hint that the French consumer might be less tradition-bound. Last year Augusto Burziois sold one million plastic bottles of wine to French supermarkets, two million small plastic bottles to restaurant chain Flunch and 20,000 plastic bottles of organic wine to retailer Monoprix. "I think we can have both glass and plastic," said Fernandez, "but there is risk of a huge battle in our profession if we bottle our wine in plastic."

Plastic-bottled wine has met with virul in other parts of France, despite consumer demand. When the Boisset Family Estates lightened the load with PET bottled Beaujolais Nouveau in Japan, Canada and the United States - "where the environment is important", noted Nathalie Berge-Bosses - producers were outraged. The Beaujolais winegrowers union has since banned bottling their wine, including Nouveau Beaujolais, in plastic.

Boisset put its Beaujolais back in glass but continues to bottle wines from other regions, including the Languedoc, in plastic. "I'm not ashamed," said Boisset. "We don't have any tattoos and we believe in the environment."

And plastic bottles undeniably open new markets for the wine trade. "I'm looking at the heating works", said Joseph. "You don't want glass on a boat."



Penelope Cruz with actors Javier Bardem (L) and Johnny Depp and director Rick Marshall (R) and CEO of Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, Leron Gubler (front row L).

Hollywood star for Cruz

HOLLYWOOD **MP** - Oscar-winning actress Penelope Cruz paid tribute to family and supporters Friday - including her newborn baby son - as she was given a star on Hollywood's famed Walk of Fame. In ceremony, Johnny Depp described Cruz, who stars in the latest instalment of the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' franchise, as an "inaccessibly phenomenal mother" and a "magical woman". "Today is a very special day that I will always remember," said Cruz, showing off her post-pregnancy figure as she received the 2,438th star on the Walk of Fame, which stretches along Hollywood Boulevard. "Every time I look at that star, I will see the names of all the people that have helped me make many of my dreams a reality," she added. She notably thanked her parents, brother Eduardo and sister Monica, actor husband Javier Bardem - who also attended the ceremony - and her baby son Leonardo. "So making me happy every day," Cruz gave birth to her first child in January at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Beverly Hills, but she and fellow Spaniard Bardem have kept a low profile since then.

Depp, who returns as Captain Jack Sparrow in 'Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides' in May, also called Cruz "a hybrid and true a friend as anyone could dream of."

Cruz, 38, and Bardem, 41, met when they started opposite each other as baby faces in the Spanish film 'Jamón, Jamón', back in 1992. In 2004, they were back together on the silver screen in Woody Allen's 'Vicky Cristina Barcelona', for which Cruz won an Academy Award as best supporting actress. The couple married in July last year at a ceremony in the Bahamas. ■



Artist Lisa Caveltz stands between Frida 39 (L) and Frida 34 (R), part of her exhibition 'La Perle Nègre: a personal tribute to Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, on April 1, 2011. Formed of powerful striking images on monumental canvases, the exhibition goes on show to the public at the Opera Gallery on London's New Bond Street from April 1st 2011 until April 25th 2011. AFP PHOTO

ART



Bangladeshi artist exhibits in US

PEOPLE Bangladeshi-American painter Merissa Jahon Bose exhibited some of her work in a group show that opened on March 4, 2011 in Washington DC at the Hillier Art Space, which is part of the Hillier International Arts and Artists, a non-profit organization showcasing the work of international and local artists.

Celebrated Washington DC photographer Tom Woffel was the juror and curator of the show and chose a number of up and coming member artists for the exhibition. The three paintings by Bose include Bengali writing and her signature bold colours using red and pink hand mixed pigments. One of the paintings 'Merry Me' uses cut-outs from Bengali matrimonial advertisements. Using minimal elements, the painting reflects the essence of urban life in Dhaka. Bose says her symbolic works are about identity, love, and the female experience. She uses a unique, personal language using text, fabric, photographs and symbols from the East and West. She held a solo exhibition in July 2011 at the Dhaka Art Centre and recently moved to Washington DC from Paris. This was the first time her work was exhibited in the US. The exhibition ended on March 25, 2011. ■



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