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Glass Keeps Wine’s Premium Image

Study of 2,000 U.S. consumers finds cans, cartons and plastic bottles still trail glass on quality perceptions

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A new study of American wine drinkers suggests that glass still holds the strongest premium image in the market, even as wineries and beverage companies look for lighter, cheaper and more sustainable packaging.

Researchers surveyed 2,000 consumers in the United States and found that glass remained the package most closely associated with quality and a higher price. Other formats, including cans, cartons and plastic bottles, were viewed as more practical or environmentally friendly in some cases, but they did not match glass when people were asked which container signaled a premium wine. The findings matter because packaging decisions can shape how much shoppers are willing to pay and whether they will accept alternatives that reduce shipping weight or carbon emissions.

The study comes as the wine industry faces pressure from rising costs, changing drinking habits and growing concern about sustainability. Glass bottles are heavy, expensive to transport and energy-intensive to produce. They also remain the standard for many wines sold in restaurants and retail stores. Producers have been testing alternatives for years, especially for lower-priced wines, ready-to-drink products and single-serve formats. But consumer perception has often slowed adoption.

The researchers found that sustainability could soften resistance to non-glass packaging, but only up to a point. When respondents were told that a package had environmental benefits, they were more open to considering it. Even so, glass kept its advantage as the container most likely to support a premium image. That suggests wineries may be able to win over some buyers with clear sustainability messaging, but they may still struggle if they want consumers to see an alternative package as equal to glass in quality.

The survey also points to a split between what consumers say they value and what they expect from wine. Many shoppers now say they care about climate impact and packaging waste. At the same time, wine remains a category where tradition carries weight. For many buyers, the bottle itself is part of the product’s identity. That makes packaging a marketing issue as much as an operational one.

For wineries, the results could influence decisions about which wines are candidates for alternative packaging and how those products are positioned on shelves. A brand aiming at value-conscious or environmentally minded customers may have room to experiment with cans or cartons. A label trying to command a higher price may still need glass to preserve its image.

The findings also arrive at a moment when beverage companies across categories are rethinking packaging under pressure from retailers, regulators and consumers. Beer and spirits makers have moved faster than wine in some alternative formats, partly because their customers have been more willing to accept them. Wine has been slower to change, in part because of its long association with ceremony, aging and gift giving.

The study adds evidence that those associations remain strong in the United States. Even among consumers open to sustainability claims, glass continues to dominate perceptions of quality. For now, that means any serious challenge to wine’s traditional bottle will have to overcome not just logistics and cost, but also the idea of what wine is supposed to look like when it reaches the table.