

San Francisco Chronicle

Best bets for wine in a box

Lynne Char Bennett

Sunday, July 3, 2011

It's been a couple of years since we've checked out box wine options. From our sampling of nearly three dozen 3-liter boxes - an equivalent volume of four 750 ml bottles - there seem to be more choices with varietal character, not just pleasant adult beverage-ness.

The Wine Cube, a Target store offering from Trinchero Family Estates, hit the bull's-eye with four varietal choices: Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon. At \$17 each (that's \$4.25 per 750 ml) it was also the least expensive.

Another readily available label, Big House, showed strong across the board. We tasted a few imports too, and had more success with whites than reds. Italy's Duca del Frassino offered two enjoyable white blends. The boxes offer easy transportability and last about four weeks once opened. So I'm on board - especially if the plan involves picnics. Once it's in your glass, it's the wine that counts.

2009 Alandra Alentejo Red (\$21; 13% alcohol): A rustic, country red from Portugal's Herdade do Esporão with moderate tannins and plenty of red fruit. Try it with grilled and roasted pork or oily fish like sardines. (Importer: HCG Imports)

2009 Big House Cardinal Zin Beastly Old Vines California Zinfandel (\$22; 13.5%): A dialed-down style that has balanced berry fruit, is nicely made and is still big enough to accompany [barbecue](#) and sausages. The favorite of the Big House lineup.

2009 Black Box Wines Central Coast Shiraz (\$25, 13.5%): Black Box was an early entry into premium boxed wines nearly a decade ago. Give the bold berry flavors and hint of gaminess a slight chill - especially if it's a hot day.

2010 Duca del Frassino Venezia IGT Garganega-Pinot Grigio (\$19; 12%): A Soave-like wine with depth, breadth and a slight amaro-bitter almond note on the finish. Or try the 2010 Duca del Frassino Venezia IGT Durello-Chardonnay (\$19, 12%) with simple grilled chicken or white-fleshed fish. (Importer: MW Imports)

2010 La Petite Frog Coteaux du Languedoc Picpoul de Pinet (\$35; 12.5%) If your palate prefers leaner wine, you'll enjoy this white from southern France, with its zippy citrus and mineral hints. (Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils)

2008 Powers Washington Cabernet

Sauvignon (\$24; 13.5%): The most varietal and well-structured Cabernet of those tasted.

2009 R. Muller Landwein Rhein Riesling (\$24; 9.5%): The German category of Landwein (country wine) falls between tafelwein (table wine) and the QbA designations. Apricot and lichee; lighter-bodied and relatively sweet, but still considered off-dry. (Importer: Underdog Wine Merchants)

2010 Trinchero Family Estates Wine Cube California Sauvignon Blanc (\$17; 13%): Slightly grassy and very varietal, with bright lemon and lime peel, stone fruit aromas and flavors. A terrific option for your go-to summer white, while the 2009 Wine Cube Pinot Noir (\$17, 13.5%) is a perfect red for salmon.

Lynne Char Bennett is a Chronicle staff writer. E-mail her at lbennett@sfnchronicle.com.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/07/03/FD3K1K4NQJ.DTL>

