

# UNCANNY

The rise of cans in the wine ecosystem



## UNDER THE INFLUENCE

INFINITE MONKEY THEOREM  
BUBBLE UNIVERSE

While he is no longer the winemaker at Infinite Monkey Theorem, which he founded in Denver, Ben Parsons' legacy will include his role as an early adapter to the canned wine movement. In 2011, he first opted to put wine into tall 250-millimeter cans with monkeys on the label. A decidedly innovative move. Now the company is well known for their role as innovators in the can. This sparkling riesling is the perfect wine for the medium. Served well-chilled from a Rocky Mountain stream, it is a revelation on a summer day.



**YOU'VE BEEN THERE.** Standing in the liquor store, checking out cans of craft beers with outrageous graphics stacked side by side in the cooler. And then you spy some oddly sized cans that look a little different. As you come closer, you see it's not beer. It's wine.



KELLY J. HAYES

The canned wine movement is having a moment. And if the trend keeps moving in the direction it has been, with sales growing in the vicinity of 79% in just the past year alone, a full-fledged hour is not out of the question.

As we transition to the summer months you will surely see more canned wine options. Trust me.

Canned wines are still in their relative youth. In the early 2000s, Francis Ford Coppola's Niebaum Coppola Winery introduced an experimental run of 5,000 cases of sparkling wine in cute pink cans labeled as Sofia Mini Blanc de Blancs. The wines were named for Francis' daughter, Sofia — yes, the film and television director ("Lost in Translation," "The Beguiled").

Though not the first company to try tin, or rather aluminum, as a vessel for delivering fresh, young quaffable wine, the pedigree of the producer, the packaging of the

product and the promotional punch (at the time the cans were marketed as perfect for "the 'Sex and the City' crowd") helped kickstart an industry. As recently as 2012, the canned wine movement accounted for just \$2 million in sales.

But cans have become a thing. Much of it has to do with the acceptance by millennials of the convenience and environmental upgrade that alternative packaging, including bag-in-box wines and Tetrapacks, bring to the party. Among younger consumers there is less of a stigma about what constitutes an appropriate package for wine. A bottle is no longer seen as the only option. In fact, for some, cans may be a better option.

There are many ways to look at the environmental impacts of cans versus glass, but it is incontrovertible that cans weigh considerably less than bottles and produce a smaller carbon footprint when shipped. Evidence also shows that cans are more likely, by a wide margin, to be recycled. And cans are much easier to take along to outdoor parties, on camping trips or simply to backyard barbecues. All are elements of the active lifestyle that younger wine consumers covet.

Like any wine that goes boom in the marketplace, the problem becomes separating the quality from the plonk. It is just too easy for any wine company to simply make a wine, put it in a can and join the

movement. But there are indeed canned wines where the metal meets the road, to coin a phrase. Perhaps the easiest way to make a selection is to go with what you know and pick wines from producers with a track record.

That Coppola Sofia Blanc de Blancs is a good example. Last year it received a Gold Medal at the 2019 International Canned Wine Competition for the refreshing blend of California grown pinot blanc, riesling and muscat. The wine comes in single-serve 187-milliliter cans (equivalent to one glass) and when chilled it will show why it is still around long after "Sex and the City" went to Netflix.

A newer comer to the scene — but one that shares the concept of having also been christened with the name of a winemaker's daughter — comes from the Zuccardi winemaking family of Argentina. Santa Julia produces a trio of wines in stylish 375-milliliter cans produced from organic vineyards. A rosé of malbec is worthy of popping the top and pouring into a glass, or two. They also produce a red blend of malbec and bonarda, under the Tintillo title, which is a full-on red wine and, finally, a steel-aged chardonnay.

Staying on the name-known and organic front are wines made in Mendocino, California, by Bonterra, an innovator in sustainable wines. They have launched four-can packs

with rosé, sauvignon blanc and a light "Young Red" version. Released for the first time just a year ago, Bonterra cans could be a wine to look for this summer.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous brand of canned wines from an independent producer are the sleek, clean cans of Underwood produced in Oregon by the Union Wine Co. After debuting their wines in cans just seven years ago, they have gone deep into the process. Their distinctive silver cans deliver bottle-quality pinot noir and other varieties from Oregon.

Fresh young wines, perhaps with a bit of fizz, are what work best in cans. Cans are for convenience when you want something cold and refreshing. Give a canned wine a try this summer.

It just might fit your lifestyle.