

Where to Buy Good Wine – By the Keg

By Kara Newman

When North Fork winery Lieb Cellars introduced its Bridge Lane label in 2004—intended to showcase lighter, fruitier, everyday wines—few high-end vintners were showcasing wine in boxes. It was bottles all the way, baby.

But in the span of a decade, so much has changed. Like a growing number of wineries, Bridge Lane has replaced the cork stoppers on its bottles with screw-on caps, so there's no need to pack a corkscrew for beachside sipping. At the same time, eco-friendly, recyclable boxed wines have gained market share (Bridge Lane now offers three-liter bags in boxes, the equivalent of four bottles). And for 2014, add to the list one more packaging innovation: wines sold in 20-liter kegs.

That's right: kegged wine has arrived, bringing new meaning to Hamptons keg parties. Forget the fraternity beer-keg associations: Instead, these festive plastic kegs topped in bright colors are intended for serving wine at weddings and large parties. Indeed, Bridge is so bullish on kegs, a full third of its wine going forward will be sold in kegs. "Bridge Lane is all about breaking tradition and being innovative while still offering great-tasting wine at reasonable price points," explains Dana Kowalsick, marketing and Wine Club manager for Lieb Cellars.

The kegs, which each hold the equivalent of 26 bottles of Bridge's Chardonnay, rosé, and Merlot-based blends, launched in March, and are a logical extension of the fast-growing wine-on-tap trend seen in restaurants and bars over the last few years. However, Kowalsick says, Lieb is the first winery in New York to sell kegged wine directly to consumers as well as distribute it wholesale. "[Kegs] are perfect for weddings and large parties because they produce less waste," she continues. "All you need is a standard beer tap [the wine will last for up to three days with a tap] or a kegerator [the wine will last for up to three months]."

