

# Thinking inside the box: Red, white and rosé

**Edward Deitch recommends a new wine line that's not in your typical bottle**

Vine Views by Edward Deitch

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For reasons that will become clear in a moment, it is tempting not to start a review of a new line of wines called Yellow + Blue with the fact that they are excellent values at \$11 or \$12 for a liter, a third more wine than in a typical bottle. Or that the three wines from Argentina and Spain compare very favorably with similar wines at this price. Or that, to top it off, they are made from organically grown grapes.

The temptation is to start with the fact that Yellow + Blue comes in a box. Yes, a cardboard box that is called, in the rather clinical lexicon of the packaging world, a Tetra Pak, with a plastic spout that screws off. If I'm not mistaken, these are the same boxes used by various brands of chicken stock, kids' fruit drinks and other more basic liquids. At this point in our story it would be helpful to suspend any romantic notions you might have about opening and pouring a bottle of wine.

Now, Yellow + Blue is first and foremost about what's in the box, not the box itself, which is just the way Matthew Cain conceived it when he started the company a year or so ago after a decade in the wine importing business. The idea, he says, was to box premium organic wines "from real wineries" in distinct appellations to distinguish them from more generic boxed wines

Of course, for environmental reasons it didn't hurt that a Tetra Pak is a fraction of the weight of a wine bottle, although with its liter size, a box of Yellow + Blue weighed roughly the same as a standard bottle of wine when I compared them holding one in each hand. I guess when you add it all up, more wine is being shipped with less, or lighter, packaging, which cuts down on fuel and emissions (now I get it: Yellow + Blue = green).

Those fuel and pollution reductions are also achieved by the fact that the wines — a malbec and a torrontes from Argentina and a Spanish rosé — are shipped to this country as finished wine in steel tanks and then boxed here. One thing to keep in mind is that, once opened, the Tetra Paks don't preserve the wine any longer than bottles do, making them different from bag-in-box bulk wine containers, an image with which Cain wants no association.

With that in mind, he says he doesn't see his wines being sold in big discount retail chains, preferring to get them into higher-end wine stores such as Chambers Street Wines in New York or Sam's Wines & Spirits in Chicago, both of which carry the brand, as do many other retailers in the 47 states where Yellow + Blue is sold. In these stores and in this economy, he believes he can capitalize on the fact that "people are trading down" in wine, though not too far down. The strategy seems to be working. The company, he says, has been profitable from the start.

Another target is upscale restaurants. Don't laugh. In fact, I met Cain at Hearth, a well-respected downtown Manhattan place that has the torrantes on the wine list and where a few writers had been invited for an introduction to Yellow + Blue. Hearth has the look and feel of a country restaurant in, say, Provence or Tuscany, and as we sat around a large wooden table there seemed to be something slightly out of sync as the servers poured from the boxes. I found myself looking up at their faces for a disdainful smirk, perhaps, or a snide little comment. But the presentation was seamless.

The boxes were kept off the table, perhaps deliberately so we wouldn't fixate on them. The good news is that I found myself forgetting about the containers as I began to taste the wines. First came the 2008 Torrantes from the Cafayate Valley of Argentina. Torrantes is the country's most interesting white variety and deserves to be better known in this country. With its unusual floral, citrus and grassy notes, Yellow + Blue's example was well-suited to the first course, neutralizing the saltiness of smoked brook trout and doing justice to the avocado and cucumber accompaniments.

Next was the 2008 Rosé from the Alicante region of southeast Spain. I've tasted more than a dozen rosés in the last couple of months or so and I have no hesitation with this one, which is copper in color and a blend of 80 percent syrah and 20 percent monastrell (known in France as mourvèdre). This is a fairly substantial rosé with raspberry and spice notes, ample acidity and a lingering finish that will complement a range of foods, including simply prepared meats, chicken and duck.

Unfortunately, it was mismatched with our second course at Hearth — ricotta tortelli with spring vegetables, lemon and fiore sardo, a pecorino cheese from Sardinia. The cheeses simply clashed with the rosé. But things were back on track with a main course of roasted pork loin with smoked pork belly, turnips and artichokes. For this the 2008 Malbec from Argentina's San Juan province, young and grapey with notes of blackberry, leather and a touch of mint, did the trick.

So yes, I am recommending the wines without reservation and feel I am close to getting comfortable with the box thing. It seems to me there are two choices when serving Yellow + Blue: Do what they did at Hearth and keep the boxes largely out of sight, or, take a stand, show them off and let others know that you aren't boxed in when it comes to bottled wine.