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Tagus Creek

Seeing the light

Some wineries make heavy weather of packaging. **Tim Atkin** opts for ethical wines that won't give the planet a hangover



Imagine the scene in A&E. A patient is nursing a badly sprained wrist and the duty doctor asks what happened. Various possibilities jostle in his mind. Over-enthusiastic gym visit? Domestic squabble? Fall on black ice? The patient looks embarrassed, but confesses. "Er, I did it lifting a bottle of wine off the table."

If this sounds implausible, I'd like to put one of the three red wines that are sitting on my desk in your hand. They weigh more than a lot of dumb-bells. In fact, placing 12 of each in a wooden case and carrying them for a few vein-popping yards could feature in the contest for the world's strongest man.

At a time when we're supposed to be reducing our carbon footprints, an increasing number of producers are packaging their wines in disgracefully heavy bottles. It is mainly, but not exclusively, a Latin thing: the major culprits are Spain, Italy and Argentina, where anyone who makes an icon wine seems to come over all macho and purchase the thickest glass available.

In an effort to arrest this runaway trend, I've taken the decision not to recommend anything on these pages that comes in a heavyweight bottle. The only exception will be Champagne and sparkling wine, where the wine style (and the potential for serious

accident) dictates the choice of package. I will not hesitate to name and shame.

If you're looking to make your own small impact on the world of wine, there are a number of things you can do: buy from carbon-neutral wineries such as Grove Mill in New Zealand or Cullen in Australia; switch to wines packaged in bag-in-box, plastic, Tetra Pak or lightweight glass; support the UK's 416 wineries (who don't have to ship their wines as far) and favour

brands that give money to charities or eco-projects, such as **Tagus Creek** (The British Legion) or Banrock Station (the Australian wetlands). Every little helps...

Another possibility is to buy wines that are shipped to the UK in bulk, something

which is favoured by many large New World producers, especially those that supply cut-price own-label wines to supermarkets.

There's an element of self-interest here – it keeps costs down – but there's no denying the environmental benefits, too. Waitrose, which is leading the way in "feel-good wines", has even introduced its own Virtue line, which is shipped in flexitanks and packaged in lightweight bottles made from 60% recycled glass. I just wish they tasted a little better...

For all that, the quickest way to make a difference as an ordinary wine drinker is to buy from a Fairtrade producer. This is not the gamble it once was. There are now 51 of these, in South Africa (29), Argentina (12) and Chile (10) and quality is much better than it was even two years ago. I was a judge at the 2009 Fairtrade Awards (the results will be announced on 19 November) and I was impressed by the best wines.

The Co-operative has by far the best range of Fairtrade wines, with 16 different labels, but all of the other supermarkets are now supporting the brand. My current favourites, three of which did well in the 2009 awards, are the juicy, raspberryish **2008 Sainsbury's Fairtrade Pinotage, Citrusdal, Olifant's River (£4.99, 14%)**; the peachy, honeyed **2009 Fairhills Fairtrade Chenin/Chardonnay, Western Cape (£5.48, 12.5%, Asda)**, both from South Africa; the grassy **2008 Los Unidos Fairtrade Carmenère/Cabernet Franc, Chile (£5.49, 13%, Waitrose)**; the vibrant, slightly sweet **2009 Co-operative Fairtrade Chilean Merlot Rosé (£4.99, 14%)** and from Argentina, the floral, citrus-scented **2009 Fairtrade Tilimuqui Single Vineyard Torrontés,**



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Famatina Valley, La Rioja (£6.29, 12.5%,
Waitrose). These are wines you can drink
with pleasure – and without fear of injury.★
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