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Stainless steel KEGs protect wine and the environment

Benefits of using KEGs for wine packaging

The high level of sensory sensitivity in wine means that the industry needs to devote particular attention to packaging. For consumers, wine is bottled as a rule. However, in production, trade and commerce, KEGs have long since entered the frame. Product quality, hygiene, better transport and storage and the fact that they can be fully recycled are the decisive criteria for why stainless steel KEGs today are the first choice, not only economically but in terms of sustainability. Here's an overview.

The KEG's tradition and history is indisputably linked to beer. However, using these stainless steel barrels as packaging for other beverages is becoming ever more prevalent. Changing the dispensing gas to a nitrogen mixture that doesn't carbonate the contents has meant that today, KEGs can be used for still alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages without any problems. Whereas our neighbours in Austria and Switzerland already put this fact to good use in packaging for wine and spirits, the German market is still largely untapped. So it's left to examples from Austrian wineries and distilleries to demonstrate the advantages these stainless steel barrels have over bottles or even plastic containers.

Benefits of using KEGs

On the one hand, these benefits are of a very pragmatic nature. Barrels are more resistant to light and consequently offer better protection for the contents. Just as they do for beer, KEGs also offer 100 % protection from UV light for wines, because they allow no light to pass enabling them to be stored in pubs and restaurants for much longer periods. In contrast to plastic, which generally allows substances to leach into the environment with detrimental effects, KEGs have no influence whatsoever on the aroma or flavour of their contents.

The gastronomy trade sees many benefits of its own. Landlords can easily convert from bottles to dispensing systems. More accurate portioning and therefore better billing is possible by using the right type of system with an integrated counting function. This also eliminates residual wastage completely. There are also logistics benefits: KEGs are at least as easy to store as bottles and utilize the available space in delivery vehicles just as well. However, they are stackable and far less susceptible to inadvertent damage during transport. This cuts out broken glass altogether. The design of some KEGs even provides them with a shock absorber effect that protects the KEG from impact if it falls or is dropped. And finally, the numbering on the KEGs makes inventory much easier.

Besides their classic gastronomic uses, KEGs can also serve as flexible mini dispensing systems at parties or large-scale events, as well as in bistros or catering businesses. Such mini-dispensers are available as self-sufficient, two-chamber systems with an integrated gas supply that guarantee more output, without being tied to a conventional dispensing system or a bar.

One benefit which is gaining increasing importance is sustainability. Their multiple use alone reduces waste. When handled properly, KEGs can be used for over 20 years, which leads to

a significant reduction in CO2 emissions. And when they are eventually taken out of service, they can be completely recycled.

Besides their shapes and sizes, KEGS ultimately have one decisive advantage: their versatile branding potential makes brand presentation significantly more individual. In-mould labelling for instance is used by many premium breweries and wine growers. Also depending on the model, further possibilities include in-mould coating, PU dyeing, coloured PP top and bottom rings, logo embossing, laser printing in the collar and base area or silk screen printing directly onto the KEG body.

The future promises more

It's not without reason that the already mentioned Austrian and Swiss wine producers and distillers are a prime example for the use of KEGs. For instance, the family-run wine growing business "Weingut Müller" from Krustetten in Austria recognized the benefits of KEGs as a packaging for their wine at an early stage. That was based on two essential features: on the one hand, reusable KEGs tie in with the company's sustainability policy much more clearly, and on the other, certain technological features provide economic benefits – especially for restaurants and caterers, the winery's main customers.

The Erber distillery from Brixen im Thale in the Kitzbühel Alps, on the other side of the country, is the oldest copper still distillery in Austria. It has won numerous awards, such as "Schnapps of the Year", Destillata, Gault Millau, DLG Gold Medals and World Spirits Awards and shows that KEGs can certainly be used for spirits and mulled wine, very popular beverages in mountain chalets and skiing lodges.

KEGs at the LVWO

In addition to this, wine institutes are also working together with KEG manufacturers to make use of the positive characteristics KEGs can offer. SCHÄFER Container Systems, for instance, is also the KEG supplier for the State Academy and Research Institute Wine and Fruit Growing (LVWO) in Weinsberg, Baden-Württemberg.

Simon Bachmann, responsible for wine-making trials and experiments at the LVWO, and his team ferment and store their experimental wines in KEGs. Basically, KEGs are optimally suited to storing small lots like experimental wines, but also süsreserve and "top-up wines" KEGs can be emptied using nitrogen or CO2 and any residual quantities can be safely kept in anaerobic storage.

"In our experiments, just like in wineries generally, hygiene, gas and light impermeability, as well as the economic and ecological aspects of recyclability play decisive roles", says Simon Bachmann. "We see these as being guaranteed by SCHÄFER KEGs and so we use them in our experiments and at the state-run vineyard."

Bachmann goes on to say, that the benefits of using quality products are the guaranteed quality standards, but also their continuous improvement in terms of weight and material reduction, which prove to be great benefits in practice.

Quality and safety at the Bavarian State Institute for Viticulture and Horticulture

As the major state research institute, the Bavarian State Institute for Viticulture and Horticulture (LWG) also uses KEGs for storing its up to 400 experimental wines. In addition, it also has 20 hectares of land where wine is produced. In the past glass carboys were used, but any breakages could result in the loss of an entire year's test series. Plastic containers are not used as they are neither 100 % impermeable to gas nor tasteless and they also react with alcohol. That's why stainless steel KEGs are the first choice for the experimentation series.

"In our practice-based research, KEGs are absolutely indispensable. They guarantee the quality of our tests and reproducible conditions for our results", says Johannes Burkert, deputy head of Oenology at the LWG. "Our experience with SCHÄFER KEGs has been good. They not only have the right product quality, the entire purchasing and delivery process is reliable and professional from start to finish."

Conclusion

Unlike a few decades ago, more and more wine is now being grown, stored, transported and drunk in Germany. KEGs are indestructible helpers in this and can offer a great many advantages over plastic, glass and wood. Stable quality standards, practical for transport and storage, as well as sustainability through multiple use and recycling are the outstanding attributes that set them apart.

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About SCHÄFER Container Systems (www.schaefer-container-systems.de):

SCHÄFER Container Systems, an innovative manufacturer of high-quality container systems (KEGs) for beverages and of IBCs and special stainless steel containers for liquids, solids and granulates, is part of the internationally successful SCHÄFER WERKE.

This owner-led enterprise is headquartered in Neunkirchen in Germany's Siegerland region and operates globally with diversified business areas: EMW Steel Service Centre, perforated sheets, expanded metal, standard and special containers in stainless steel and installations for data centres, workshops and factories, as well as data management systems for load carriers. The work of all these divisions is based on high-quality fine steel sheet. The processing of this material is one of the core competencies of this enterprise.