

Wine Program Toasts New Domestic Wines



Oct. 15, 2020 – Retail Business Services’ Private Label Wine Project is raising a glass to a new innovation: Private Brands domestic wines.

In 2019, Retail Business Services launched a three-year Private Label Wine Project led by Jonas De Maere, Wine Manager. The program brought imported wine lines to brand stores, and in 2020 launched new domestic wines.

“One of the things we realized very soon after launching this project is that imports are great, but most of the consumption in the U.S. is domestic wine,” Jonas said.

In his role, Jonas leverages his wine tasting experience and private label expertise to serve as a liaison between brand Category Management teams and wine buyers. When the program shifted part of its focus to domestic wines, he made the trek to California – the shining jewel of America’s wine country – where he toured more than 30 wineries, looking for the perfect fit that could handle supply, bottling and production.

“After a rigorous process, we partnered with Fior di Sole winery, located in Napa – so they’re in the heart of California wine country,” Jonas said.

While the wine itself is not sourced from Napa, it is all California wine. You can find these new wines under the Grape Wagon and Billings Farm labels in local Food Lion and Hannaford stores.

“At the moment, these wines are only available at two of the local brands,” Jonas said. “So, if shoppers like them, the only place they can buy them are in these stores.”

And for these wines, quality is key.

“Because we control the process – we start this from scratch – we have everything in our own hands,” Jonas added. “We follow the product all the way from the winery to the store, and we try to keep the costs as low as possible.”

The Grape Wagon and Billings Farm brands feature six varieties of wine – including Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Moscato and Cabernet Sauvignon – at great price points while growing margins more than 10%.

This year the Private Label Wine Project also launched a new imported line: Wine in a Box. This product, available as Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Red Blend and Cabernet Sauvignon, is made in the Delhaize bottling facility in Belgium and designed specifically for the U.S. market.

“Box wines are really a growing segment, especially during a pandemic – we saw the numbers going up 20% during this time,” Jonas explained. “The advantage to a box is that the wines keep very well. You can keep it for up to three months, and the wine quality will remain as high for the tenth glass as it was for the first.”