

Carboys vs. Demijohns



For those wine makers who are starting to increase the total annual volume of wine being produced, the question of bulk storage needs to be addressed. Wines tend to age better when stored in bulk as opposed to being bottled in 750 ml or 1.5 ml wine bottles, or one-gallon jugs. Bulk ageing will promote better blending of all the flavor constituents present and will yield a more uniform product in less time. This added age will also assure the completion of Malo-Lactic fermentation and avoid pushed corks or worse, exploding bottles. After a few successful beginning years, you may want to step up production to 30 or more gallons of a particular variety. Oak barrels can be a bit intimidating with the necessary maintenance and cleaning protocol and variable capacity stainless tanks may be a bit more than the budget can support. You may be therefore tempted to step up volume and use demijohns, some of which can be approximately 15+ gallons each. But wait, you may want to reconsider for the following reasons:

Examine the glass demijohn container; it is a round bulbous shape with a 2-3 inch opening at the top. The glass is of varying thickness from top to bottom. There is no easy means of grasping the container without the use of a basket, into which the demijohn is placed. The basket has two purposes; the first is to afford some degree of protection to the fragile glass, and the second is to provide two handles for lifting the container. With a full load, a demijohn can weigh as much as 120-130 pounds. This requires at least two people to handle, very carefully. Unless a pump is used for racking, one demijohn must always be higher than the other during racking (siphoning). Most wines will need at least three rackings, that means manhandling/lifting the demijohns at least three times. It is further impossible to observe visually the fermenting/ageing process underway inside the demijohn.

A better approach is to stay with 5 gallon glass carboys. Three five-gallon carboys will give the same volume as one fifteen-gallon demijohn. The advantages of carboys are several. At approximately forty pounds, one person can, with relative ease, move/lift one fully loaded carboy very safely. The shape of a carboy (cylindrical with relatively thick glass walls) makes for a rather sturdy container. No basket is necessary for protection or handling thereby allowing full visual views of the fermenting/ageing process. And as a bonus, should something foul happen

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to your wine in a container, your loss may be limited to five as opposed to fifteen gallons. You may also make three different wines out of the same batch; as an example, one with induced Malo-Lactic fermentation, one with American oak chips, one with French oak chips, etc. Three carboys can be stored in about the same space as one demijohn or less, since space for two people to lift is eliminated. And finally, cleaning three carboys is a lot easier and less risky than struggling to clean one awkward demijohn.

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