

Urban Winery Finds Sustainable Way to Serve Its Wines

WINERY: Using New Device, Reusable Growlers Are Filled From Barrels

■ By SARAH de CRESCENZO

One urban winery in San Diego has found success taking a page out of the craft beer industry's playbook.

LJ Crafted Wines, a family-owned and operated winery in the Bird Rock neighborhood of La Jolla, recently announced the company had switched over to using reusable growlers instead of bottles to get its wine to customers.

That's intended to eliminate the packaging that goes along with bottling wines in the traditional fashion, said owner **Lowell Jooste**, who opened the winery with his wife, **Anne**, last year. Before the husband-and-wife team moved their family to La Jolla in 2012, they had managed **Klein Constantia** and **Anwilka** vineyards in South Africa.

Lowell Jooste, whose family has been in the wine business for four generations, is a Cape Town native.

A device he has developed, called a "wine steward," allows the winery to serve wines directly from the barrels in which it is aging. Jooste said he is pursuing patents in the United States and in the European Union for the device.

Wine Integrity Preserved

Using the wine steward, wine is removed from the barrel and replaced with an inert gas. To bring home or somewhere besides the tasting room, the wine is poured into refillable growlers, which — just like at many local craft breweries —

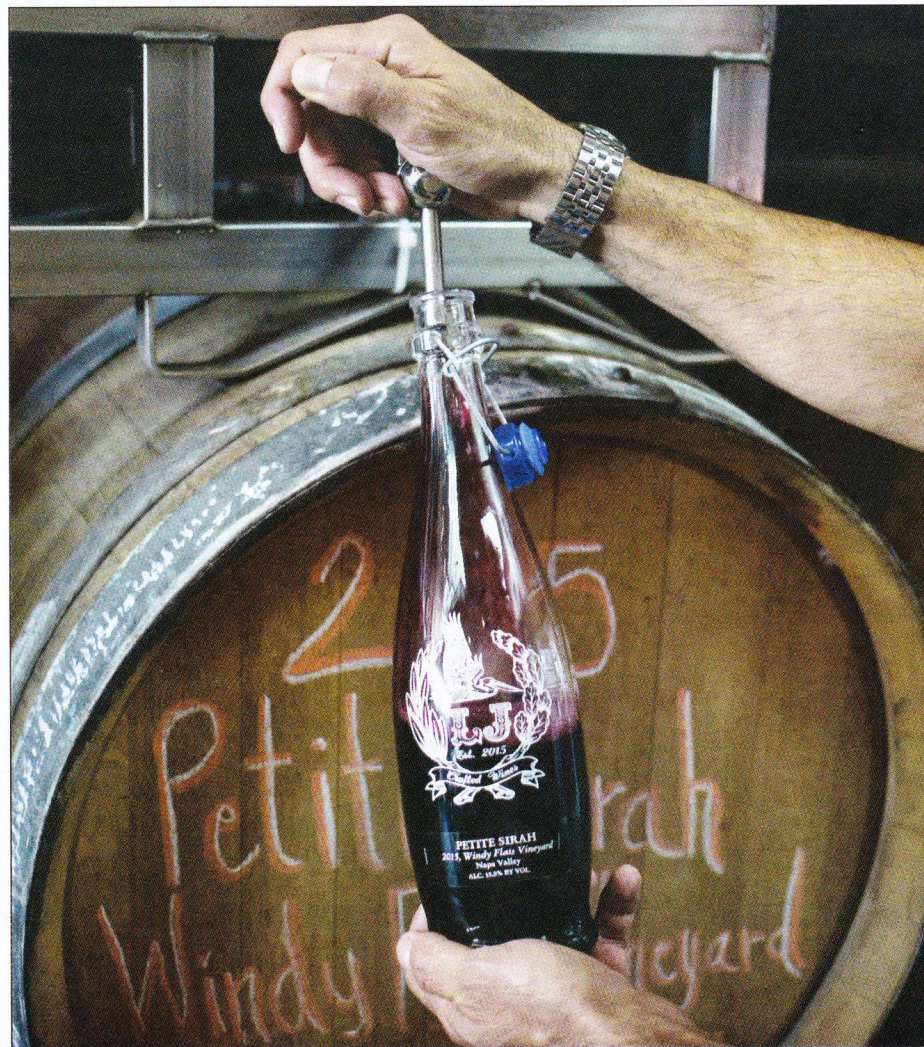


Photo courtesy of Justin Galloway

A reusable growler is filled with wine at LJ Crafted Wines using a "wine steward," a device developed by winery owner Lowell Jooste to allow wine to be served directly from barrels without affecting the quality of the remainder of the fermented juice.

can be brought back, sanitized and reused. and for every barrel the wine's integrity "We've been through about 70 barrels, has been the same from top to bottom,"

he said. "We're keeping all our original wine production up in Napa, where we buy grapes as well because the quality control is world class, and we just have to look after the quality here, and so far, the wine in refillable bottles has been very well received."

The Joostes said they were unsure whether wine drinkers would buy into their new way of serving, so they bottled half of their first vintage, in 2015, and prepared to bottle the wine left aging in the barrels if customers weren't willing to adopt the new technique of serving solely from the barrels.

Customers Take to Growlers

But it caught on, and quickly: More than 600 people are a part of LJ Crafted Wines' wine club, and 98 percent of members agreed to go the growler route, the winery said.

Per month the winery goes through about six barrels, which translated to 1,500 liters. While wine typically comes in 750 milliliter bottles, the growlers at LJ Crafted Wine hold one liter.

So far, the use of refillable growlers has allowed LJ to fill 20,000 fewer single-use bottles than it would have had the same volume of wine been purchased without the growler option.

"We're still a drop in the ocean as far as the wine industry goes, but it's something new," he said. "We really like the environmental approach: we're selling wine, not packaging."

The move to refillable growlers, which minimizes glass disposal in landfills as well as the energy required to produce the bottles, is a frequent topic of discussion in the tasting room, he added.