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New York's Lois wine bar and restaurant, serves draft wine exclusively.

## Making a Case for Draft Wine

**IT REDUCES WASTE FOR BOTH THE RESTAURANT AND THE ENVIRONMENT WHILE THE POURS COME OUT FRESHER AND AT THE PERFECT TEMPERATURE.**

By [Katie Kelly Bell](#) | [May 2019](#) | [Wine](#)

Wine is arguably the diva of beverages. It requires special tools and dedicated staff time to be opened. It is finicky about both storage and serving temperature, it is always subject to breakage, and, even with proper care, the final product can still be corked.

Draft wine, or wine on tap, offers an appealing alternative to wine's many efficiency issues.

"There are definitely more pros than cons when it comes to draft wine," says Stephan Outrequin Quaisser, co-owner of Chicago-based LM Restaurant Group. The group's French restaurant, Troquet River North, typically features 10 wines on tap in a range of serving sizes—from a 6-ounce pour to a 24-ounce offering. Outrequin Quaisser credits the restaurant's wine on tap program for better quality control. "Our tap system ensures the quality and freshness of our wines by the glass and allows for perfect temperatures in pours," he says.

Indeed, the draft wine category has grown steadily over the past decade. Heather Clauss, vice president of marketing and customer success at Free Flow Wine, a provider of wines on tap, points to more than an estimated 5,000 operators who now use keg wines across the U.S. "The operational efficiencies are hard to ignore; no time is wasted pulling corks, recycling bottles, or throwing away waste. Serving wines on tap saves operators approximately \$1 per bottle," Clauss says.

Nora O'Malley, co-owner and beverage director of New York's Lois wine bar and restaurant, serves draft wine exclusively. "We love it because it is much greener, fresher, and more accessible than traditional bottle service." O'Malley also notes that tap wine is more approachable and more of an adventure for the consumer—rather than a stress point in the meal experience. "Our customers love to be able to try every wine before they order a glass. It opens wine up for guests and servers who may have been intimidated to recommend."

However, there are some challenges with keg wine, and one of the biggest for many restaurateurs is finding space, especially in an older venue. Clauss suggests opting for small mobile kegerators or bar-top units that don't require refrigeration.

City Winery's national beverage director Ganna Fedorova is a big proponent of wines on draft but says there are a few things to keep in mind. "It's always important to ensure that the wines are stored properly, because a loss of a unit means a loss of several gallons of wine," she says. There is also a little bit of loss every day due to wines being oxidized in the lines overnight that needs to be accounted for.

For the most part, reds, whites, and rosés all show well in a keg, but there are also limits to the kinds of wine that are best suited to draft. "In steel kegs, the wines never see oxygen, so wine on tap is better suited for wines that don't need age," Clauss says.

Outrequin Quaisser has had great success with wines from California winemakers. "We currently have Meiomi rosé on tap, which is very popular. Joel Gott also has a nice selection of draft options, and we like The Federalist for reds," he says. The Federalist's Cabernet Sauvignon is on tap at Troquet.

O'Malley confesses that it's hard to pick favorite draft wine, but she loves producers such as Donkey & Goat, The Scholium Project, Red Hook Winery, Division Wine Company, Schneider & Bieler, and Tenuta Maiano.

Fedorova is glad to see wines that are considered classics being released in keg format. "I'm most impressed with the amazing quality of Scarpetta wines from Italy, and the beautiful organic and natural wines that the team at Jenny & Francois Selections bring over from France in kegs."

Regardless of what draft system one uses, O'Malley advises potential buyers to let the professionals do the installation and set-up. "Whatever you do, don't try to install it yourself. Find a professional and pay them accordingly. There are tubing and steel grades that are different for a wine system." She also counsels restaurants to clean the lines regularly to ensure the wines taste perfect.

There are still some negative consumer stereotypes about keg wine's quality. To that, Fedorova says, "Training is the key. Explain to your staff why you're implementing this system—ease and speed of service, better value, and sustainability—and turn them into your best ambassadors."