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Barokes Wines' Greg Stokes discovers markets for wine in a can

Some of the best ideas come when soaking in the bath. Just ask Archimedes.

Former detective, crown prosecutor and entrepreneur Greg Stokes had his eureka moment in an outdoor jacuzzi after reaching for a bottle of wine that slipped from his grasp and fell into the water. The bottle sank to the bottom of the jacuzzi, threatening to smash into thousands of pieces that could have cut him to ribbons.



"So I knocked the bottle into the spa," he said. "It went to the bottom but I grabbed the bottle before it smashed, and I thought to myself, 'This is pretty stupid. It's 32 degrees outside and I'm out in the sun drinking from a bottle made of glass.'"

"No, there must be a better way to actually enjoy wine in an outdoor environment, and I thought there must be a new way to store wine for a new generation of drinkers," Stokes, now chief executive of Barokes Wines, tells *The Weekend Australian*.

That was in the late 1990s. Stokes broached the subject with his business partner — the two were making wine for a range of supermarkets and bottle shops and had cranked up their production to 10,000 bottles a year.

More than five years of development followed — the challenge was to create a can that did not interfere with or change the flavour, taste and quality of the wine — so that, as Stokes likes to boast, whatever the winemaker put in the can would come out when it's opened.

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Once again fate intervened. At a friend's barbecue one new year's eve, Stokes pulled out his cans — finally in production after securing a global portfolio of patents and perfecting the manufacturing technique — and ripped the top off one to enjoy a drink.

"I cracked one of the cans open and as I cracked it open the bloke sitting in front of me, with his back to me, turned around and said, 'What the bloody hell is that?' I said, 'That's wine in a can' — to which he responded, 'What f..kkit makes wine in a can?' I said, 'Me, I'm the f..kkit.'"

The guest apologised and introduced himself as the chief financial officer of Spotlight Retail Group, owned by Morry Fraid and his nephew Zac Fried, who are estimated to be worth more than \$1.2 billion.

Fraid and Fried soon met Stokes and bought a 60 per cent stake, and invested further capital to expand the Barokes business and snare sales and licensing deals in Asia, where the company long believed its unorthodox strategy to selling wine in a can would take off.

"This has become popular in the convenience sector, especially in Asia where cans are viewed as premium packaging because they can be transported, are secure, tamper-proof, quick to chill, lightweight and fully recyclable," Stokes says.

To date, Barokes has booked sales of more than \$170 million.

It sources its wine from the south of France and southeast Australia, and has a range of styles including rose, chardonnay, cabernet and a moscato.

The Spotlight owners sold their stake to Japanese giant Daiwa more than six years ago, walking away with a \$20m-plus profit on their investment.

Stokes claims Daiwa was selling licences to the Barokes technology to other Japanese food companies in breach of the shareholder agreement and the matter is now before the courts.

Meanwhile, Barokes is ringing up annual sales of \$5m and Stokes is in talks with major US wine producers to put their wine in his patented cans.

"We are now finding that our revenue is mostly coming from the licence deals, and you are going to see some well-known global brands hit the market later this year. In North America they are using our technology and saying [that] rather than trying to re-create the wheel and bugger up their brand, they would rather use our proven technology."

Article Source

Wine In A Can Greg Stokes Aussie Inventors Barokes

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