

# Wine Bottles

Although the art of glass is almost as old as Western Civilization, wine was generally conserved and served in pottery throughout antiquity. Even as late as the sixteenth century, only the wealthy brought wine to the table from the barrel in fragile glass bottles. Thin clear glass containers served to decant the wine, thus avoiding sediment; tin and wood were the most common materials used to conserve and transport wine. One of the ways winemakers overcame the drawback of fragile glass bottles was by reinforcing the bottles with straw, wicker, or leather; the familiar straw-flasked Chianti bottles are a descendant of this practice, which first evolved in Tuscany. During the Renaissance, space was sometimes left between the glass and the straw so that ice could be inserted to cool the wine. It wasn't

until the 1600s that Englishman Sir Kenelm Digby was able to heat his furnaces to extreme temperatures using a wind tunnel and melt more sand in his glass, resulting in a globular bottle—the predecessor of the modern wine bottle. Little did Digby know that the darker glass he had fashioned also prevented wine from going bad by protecting it from light. During the 1700s, the wine bottle changed shape, coming to resemble the elongated receptacles we know today. As people began to appreciate the values of maturing wine, the modern wine bottle was born—it was perfectly suited to lie horizontally on a shelf, thus optimizing space.

From left to right: 18th-century globular bottle made in England; 17th-century thin blown glass for decanting wine; 17th-century English green glass; 15th-century Murano flask; 18th-century bottle, precursor of the modern wine bottle; 17th-century thin blown glass; late-18th-century Tuscan flask wrapped in straw.



**1300**

During the 1300s Venetian glass begins to be imported all over Europe as a luxury item, but is not used for the storage or decanting of wine

**1400**

**1491** The Duke of Medina Sidonia in Spain abolishes taxes on the export of wine on Spanish and foreign ships and the Spaniards' dominion over the wine trade begins in Europe

**1500**

By the 1500s Venetian glass is used for the service of wine at noble tables throughout Europe

**1566** The Duke of Medina Sidonia renews special privileges to the English: at least 40,000 butts of the annual Spanish wine production are sold to England and the Netherlands

**1600**

**1632** The first globular bottles, predecessor of the modern-day wine bottle, appear in England

**1662** The English Parliament recognizes Sir Kenelm Digby as the inventor of a new, stronger type of glass—ideal for storing wine

**1700**

**1716** The Grand Duke of Tuscany posts an edict defining the recipe for Chianti and establishing the borders of the Chianti region, where the straw-covered flask would first become popular

**1775** The first cylinder-shaped bottles begin to appear in Europe, making it easier to conserve wine

**1800**

**1813** William Rankin and Sons purchase 8,000 acres of the forest in the Alentejo (in Portugal), establishing the oldest surviving cork-importing firm

**1850** Iron molds are first used in the production of glass bottles

**1900**

**1920s** Mechanization is first introduced in the production of glass

**2000**