

Wine for Dummies more than a book

By Venessa Wong, Bloomberg Businessweek

In 1995, John Wiley & Sons first published "Wine for Dummies," an instructional book for aspiring oenophiles produced in the same format as the rest of the books in the popular yellow-and-black-jacketed reference series.

Other titles include "Personal Finance for Dummies," "Auto Repair for Dummies," and (a personal favorite) "Raising Chickens for Dummies."

But the "For Dummies" brand has taken its Wine 101 education a step further. It's licensed a Wines for Dummies wine, complete with labels bearing the same design as the books.

The Dummies wines were introduced in May by Vision Wine & Spirits, a New Jersey wine importer and marketer. They cost about \$10 a bottle and come in four varieties: Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon from California, and Pinot Grigio and Chianti from Italy.

"Wines for Dummies is intended for everyday consumers, regardless of experience or budget, to enjoy without anxiety or the knowledge of fancy wine lingo," said Vision Wine & Spirits Managing Director Dan Lasner in a release. "With this new brand, consumers will spend less energy worrying about which wine to choose and more energy enjoying them."

Even in a wine-savvy state like California (where the Dummies brand is scheduled to hit shelves this fall), it's not as crazy a move as it may seem at first glance.

Americans love their wine – especially the affordable stuff – and unit sales in the U.S. were up 4 percent in the 52 weeks

ended June 16, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. The top-selling brand was Barefoot Wine, which is owned by E&J Gallo Winery, the mega-winemaker behind other popular, low-cost brands such as André and Carlo Rossi.

There's also evidence that Americans are interested in actually becoming knowledgeable about wine. The "Wine for Dummies" book is now in its fifth edition, with more than 1 million copies in print. It remains a best-seller, according to Wiley.

Wines for Dummies wine is available in 15 states (Maryland, Florida, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, Alabama, Colorado, Delaware, Kentucky, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wyoming). By September, it will be in another 10 to 15 states, including California, Michigan, Arizona and Massachusetts.

Mark Tucker, marketing director for Vision Wine & Spirits, says distributors in New Jersey sold 2,100 cases to more than 500 stores and restaurants in the state during the first month. The brand is in Wegmans supermarkets and will soon be sold in Dollar General stores.

The Dummies reference series, which launched in 1991, has expanded beyond books before. It has a licensed product line that includes electronics, videos, home improvement tools and musical instrument starter packs.