

Wine lovers are skipping the stores

By Dave McIntyre, Washington Post

Jan and Michael Gibson are wine lovers who don't go to wine stores. Instead, they go directly to the wineries, and have the wines shipped to their home in Rockville, Md. They are part of the small but rapidly growing "direct to consumer" sales channel that is chipping away at the traditional post-Prohibition distribution system.

"We travel to California at least once a year to visit wineries," Jan says. They favor small wineries that sell most or all their production at the tasting room or through their wine clubs, and the couple looks for organic and biodynamic producers. "We have not found a good variety or quality of organic wines available in Maryland," she says. The Gibsons also visit wineries when they travel in New Mexico or Virginia, but their favorites are from Mendocino and Sonoma counties in California.

More than 5 million cases of wine were shipped by U.S. wineries directly to consumers last year, up 17 percent over 2015, according to an annual study published by *Wines & Vines* magazine and Ship Compliant, a company that helps wineries navigate the labyrinth of state laws and regulations governing direct shipments. Those shipments totaled \$2.3 billion in value, with the average price per bottle at \$38.69. And they accounted for 8.6 percent of domestic wine sales by value, not including restaurants. (While Americans purchased \$26.9 billion in domestic wines last year, the average price per bottle for all sales was \$9.29.)

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