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Freixenet Launches New Spanish Brand

By Mary-Colleen Tinney, *Daily News Links*

Freixenet has launched a new Spanish wine brand, Tapeña, into the U.S. market. Although the brand has been in development for two years, its release comes at a time when Spanish wines are one of the hottest segments in the industry.

Tapeña's brand identity, from packaging to flavor profile, is capitalizing on its Spanish heritage. The name is a combination of two Spanish words that have strong cultural connections: *Tapas*, which are small plates of appetizers that are traditionally served between meals, and *peña*, slang for a group of close friends.

The aim, said brand manager Erica Odden, "was to make Spanish wines approachable for the consumer and to bring the lively, energetic feel of Spain to the U.S. Typically, Spanish wines have been traditional and difficult for consumers to read. Tapeña is the antithesis to that. When you're going for *tapas*, you have your food, your friends and your wine."

Retailing for \$9.99, Tapeña is packaged in a sleek, jet-black bottle with a roughly-drawn, screen-printed white outline of a fork; underneath sits a narrow, boldly-colored label offering only varietal, vintage and country of origin information.

"The real inspiration was the *tapas* bars in Spain," said Odden. "When you go to a typical restaurant you will often see a chalkboard with the day's specials. We took that on as a theme. That's the inspiration for the fork on the label."

Tapeña initially launched with about 20,000 cases of two popular Spanish varietals, Tempranillo and Garnacha. Odden said that the flavor profile, "at their base, are very traditional Spanish wines. You will definitely be able to tell these wines are from Spain. We have added a little bit more fruit, but it's just a hint more that we have softened for this market." A third varietal, Verdejo, is planned for a summer 2007 release.

Odden is not concerned about consumers being confused by the lesser-known varietals. "I think there is a little bit of education, but we are excited to do that," she said. "People are beginning to learn about these varietals. I don't think it will be difficult to introduce them."

The brand's target market, the lucrative and experimental 21-to-35-year-old segment, have demonstrated that they are more willing to try new, unfamiliar wines. "They are into new experiences and are eager to learn about wine," said Odden. "We are targeting Tapeña at that Millennial group, those who are what we call the thoughtful apprentice. They can be the first one at the party with this new wine, to introduce it to their friends. We want to capitalize on the size [of the Millennial generation] and get them introduced to a great new wine."

Freixenet hopes to eventually expand the brand to 100,000 cases. Currently available in 20 states, Tapeña is being targeted to both on- and off-premise channels.