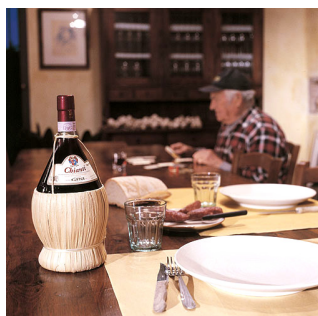


# Fiasco



[fee-YAHS-koh; fee-YAHS-kee]; pl. *Fiaschi* - Italian for "flask," the word *fiasco* is most often connected with the squat, round-bottomed, straw-covered bottle containing cheaper wine from the *Chianti* region of Italy. The straw covering not only helps the bottle sit upright, but protects the thin, fragile glass. *Fiaschi* are seldom seen today because the cost of hand-wrapping each flask for cheaper wines has become prohibitive, and the more expensive wines with aging potential need bottles that can be laid on their sides. Wine Lover's Companion

So why is the bottle called a "fiasco"? There are a number of different theories. Here are two, each one as plausible as the other.

1. *A Real Mess* – Some argue that the word "*fiasco*" stems from the same ancestor word as the English "flask." But "*fiasco*" means something entirely different to English-speakers: "an utter failure." This apparently goes back to an old Italian slang phrase, "*Fare fiasco*" or "make a bottle," for someone who has gotten into a real mess. One reference suggests that the term came from 18th century theater and referred to Italian actors trying unsuccessfully to say their lines in French ... perhaps with the assistance of a little *Chianti*
2. *Flawed by Design* - As early as 1400 AD the Italians were shipping wine to England, but had a hard time competing with the French. This is because the wine was shipped in barrels, and after the arduous trip a lot of evaporation was occurring and the quality of the wine suffered. The French had a much shorter trip and the wine didn't suffer as much. So the Italians began using blown glass bottles. Because the glass was very thin, they wrapped the bottles in straw to prevent breakage and the straw also enabled the bottle to stand upright on a table. The neck of the bottle was long and slender which enabled them to protect the wine from air by pouring olive oil on top of the wine.

With less density than the wine, the oil floated on the top. (This is still a practice in Italian households today, when wine is purchased from a nearby farmer.) The bottle came to be known as *Chianti Fiasco*, as the term *fiasco* is Latin for bottle or flask. How it became used for a "difficult situation" has many theories. One is that the original bottle from blown glass couldn't stand upright because of its round bottom. Thus, anything that was flawed by design or destined for failure was referred to as a "fiasco." Another theory is that in Venice, when a glass blower detected a flaw in the glass he was blowing, he would create a simple *fiasco* bottle from it.

Until the late 1970s, the image of *Chianti* in the United States was that of a cheap wine in a *fiasco*, the squat straw covered bottle ubiquitous on checkered tablecloths in low-budget trattorias. But over the past two decades *Chianti* has been on the upswing. Viticultural practices have been modernized and winemaking facilities updated. And the *fiasco* has been replaced by a *Bordeaux*-shaped bottle.