

Alojz Felix Jermann: getting off the pedestal, wine is young

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Alojz Felix Jermann discusses how the wine industry must reinvent itself to appeal to Generation Z. By focusing on authenticity, simplicity, and fun, wine can break down elitist barriers. He highlights the importance of sustainability, dealcoholized wines, and the role of artificial intelligence in shaping the future of wine consumption.

As part of the [Amorim Wine Vision project](#), a network of thought on technical and current topics featuring the original visions of prominent professionals in the wine world, Alojz Felix Jermann, Digital Marketing Consultant, presents a bold vision for the present and future of wine.

Why are young people moving away from wine? Jermann reveals how it's possible to break down the barriers of elitist modes and language, making wine more appealing to Generation Z with authenticity, simplicity, and, most importantly, fun. Between sustainability, dealcoholized wines, and the revolutionary impact of artificial intelligence, a sector emerges that must reinvent itself to keep up with the times. With a deep reflection on generational turnover and the value of collaboration, Jermann sends a strong message to producers: only those who open up to new trends and understand the needs of young people without betraying their identity will win over tomorrow's consumers. An interview that encourages the wine world to look to the future with openness, courage, and creativity.

There is a lot of talk about young people's disaffection with wine (especially in established markets) and their growing interest in moderation due to financial, health, and lifestyle reasons. What does wine need to do to increase its appeal among Generation Z?

Wine has many qualities and is a unique product, but these qualities are currently not understood by young people because the wine world has positioned itself in a difficult-to-reach spot, placed on a pedestal. Young people are looking for products that align with their lifestyle, which do not reference complicated and sophisticated dimensions but make them feel good and at ease. Wine often does not meet these needs, and operators and opinion leaders communicate it with terms that are often complex and distant from everyday life.

Millennials, and even more so Generation Z, are not interested in everything a sommelier or producer says about the

uniqueness of their wine. The story shouldn't be distorted but adapted to the audience being addressed. If I am presenting my wines to a buyer or at a starred restaurant, I will use an elevated language, but for young people, the message must be simple, digestible, and streamlined.

Another element missing in wine is the aspect of "fun." Tastings are always very formal and serious, but 95% of people just want to taste wine and relax, talking about what they did today and what they will do tomorrow. We need to create tastings and experiences that are fun, that are "comfortable." I say this from personal experience: many times I wasn't at ease.

Personally, I also participate in events, tastings, and experiences in the spirits world, and I notice that they have a completely different approach. They communicate technical information, but using keywords, not hours of complex storytelling for non-experts. In spirit tastings, there is always more enthusiasm and energy compared to wine. And the spirits sector is growing faster than wine, so there is certainly something to learn.

What are the main trends influencing today's wine consumers?

People want wines with good complexity but that are easy to drink. There is no longer room for cellar wines; 60% of wines sold are consumed within 2 days, but that doesn't mean the product needs to be simplified.

Alcohol content should be moderate. Red wines with an alcohol content of 16° are no longer popular. Customers are shifting to white wines with 12.5°. Sustainability is very important to Millennials and Generation Z because they are very aware of global warming. Organic wines are also very appealing, especially in the U.S., but sometimes this characteristic becomes an excuse to create wines of subpar quality.

Full-bodied and structured red wines, symbols of Made in Italy, are facing major difficulties. What are your future predictions, and what strategies should be adopted to change course?

I speak with many well-known sommeliers both in Italy and the U.S., and in the U.S., this trend is noticeable to a certain extent, but there is still a strong demand for red wines, though it has shifted to Pinot Noir. Complex wines should not lose their identity, but wineries can focus more on differentiation.

For example, Amarone is struggling, but the offer can be revamped by focusing on Valpolicella DOC, which better aligns with current demands, or offering a Nebbiolo from Montalcino, a Nerello Mascalese from Sicily—wines with aging potential but that are also very accessible.

It's not just about trends and certain consumption styles; we must also consider spending possibilities. I've noticed that vintage wines are doing well, while reserves or cru wines are struggling. Once upon a time, "wine sold itself," but that period is over. Now you need to travel, talk to the media like you, develop digital marketing strategies, and be present at different events.

What role do dealcoholized wines play in the wine market? Can they be an effective way to bring young people closer to traditional wine, or not?

There is definitely a connection, and this was one of my main topics during the last Wine2Wine. My thesis is that dealcoholized wines can serve as an entry point for new

consumers. I've fully experienced this firsthand. At first, you don't grasp the complexity, but the more you taste, the more you find your personal path.

Dealcoholized wines can be an introduction because they allow new consumers to step into the wine world easily, representing a responsible, health-conscious method. It's a way to get started in wine, and then gradually transition to traditional wines, with wineries needing to nurture the growth of this audience.

Data shows that young people are very interested in dealcoholized wines, and some sommeliers I know in Amsterdam or New York are increasingly offering dealcoholized wines, both still and sparkling. Italy is on a different path, but it's in these large capitals that trends develop. I also work as a sommelier in some restaurants, and there are customers willing to pay for the entire menu but not consume alcohol, yet still seek alternatives like dealcoholized wines. If a restaurant has 2 or 3 dealcoholized wine options on the menu (sparkling, white, and red), it's a great option to offer customers.

Will artificial intelligence impact the way consumers buy and discover new wines? If so, how?

We know that if, for example, ChatGPT is asked for wine recommendations based on individual preferences and tastes, the suggestions are often very accurate. OpenAI can be a great personal assistant, capable of providing detailed information. Artificial intelligence has its advantages, but you must know how to use it and exploit it in the right way. What's certain is that it will become increasingly present in our daily lives, so we should acknowledge it and study it to achieve better communication with the modern market and audience.

After Ireland, Belgium also wants to introduce health warnings (similar to those on cigarette packs) in all advertising messages about alcoholic beverages, including labels. What is your opinion about the growing anti-alcohol movement in Europe?

I see many examples of prominent figures in the wine world, like Gaja or Antinori, who are over 85 and still working, tasting wines, and being present at events. This shows that wine is not that harmful. Of course, like any food, excessive consumption can cause problems, so consumption should be responsible and mindful.

These alarms worry young people, and we in the wine world must keep moving forward on our path without getting too involved in these situations, because it's an aspect we cannot control directly.

Wine existed before the birth of Christ, and it will continue to exist. In the future, there may not be the constant growth we've seen in recent years. If we look at wine in the 1960s, we realize it was a defective product, more alcoholic, rough, and unrefined. Now, after decades, we've seen significant development. In 2008, we went through a major crisis, and it took years to recover. In 2020, we faced the tragedy of Covid-19. I realize we've overcome great obstacles in recent history and have always bounced back.

Is generational turnover and the inclusion of young figures at the top of wineries adequately encouraged in the

wine world, or is it a sector dominated by a gerontocracy that struggles to hand over the reins?

To reach the top of a winery, it takes many years of work and sacrifice. There's no way around that. It's also true that the generation that created the wine world struggles to give up control and has difficulty trusting the new generations. I sought my independence and a personal expression to communicate my vision of the wine sector.

Referring back to the issue of wine being distant from young people, I'd like to share another consideration: it's difficult for a producer who's 70 to excite a 20-year-old consumer—this is natural.

There should be more collaboration between generations. Boomers have knowledge and experience, but we have technical and digital skills: we should work together to succeed. Young people can't be premature, but Boomers shouldn't still believe that the choices made 30 years ago still work today. I see this as a point of conflict. The people with decision-making power in the wine world today are not yet fully open to the new ideas suggested by young people. There are also examples of 30- and 40-year-olds who have started small companies and decided to go their own way. It's not easy, and not for everyone, but I'm trying.

What is the most important message you would give to an Italian producer who wants to win over the trust and hearts of young consumers?

Be authentic; you can't create a persona to sell or to be close to consumers at all costs. It's important to be straightforward and avoid fears, communicate the product and

vision with the utmost transparency. Young people are very good at sensing when something is communicated sincerely or when there's a trick.

I'd say to this producer: "Be yourself and move forward with your own path, creating your community of supporters. The important thing is to be true, first and foremost with yourself, authenticity wins."

The producers who created today's wine world spoke their truth with great sacrifice and strong beliefs. That's why I say that communication between generations is the key to the future.

Key points

1. **Generation Z seeks wine that is simple**, fun, and aligned with their lifestyle.
2. **Wine needs to embrace sustainability** and offer easier-to-drink options, like dealcoholized wines.
3. **Wineries should adapt to digital trends** and incorporate AI into marketing.
4. **Collaboration between generations is key** to innovating the wine industry.
5. **Authenticity is crucial** to winning over young wine consumers.