Gen Z doesn’t need convincing to drink wine

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Decanter’s Gen Z Wine Challenge follows Amelia, a 21-year-old student who spent more than usual on a Provence rosé. Her story reveals five overlooked truths about how young consumers relate to wine: aesthetics matter, occasions drive purchases, packaging communicates identity, accessible language works, and reusability beats greenwashing.

We recently read a Decanter article titled “Gen Z Wine Challenge: Amelia, 21” – and the title alone was already a bad start. Yet another article describing wine as a challenge, something to impose, something that must somehow work for people who, evidently, aren’t interested in it. A somewhat paternalistic kind of communication. And then people wonder why younger generations prefer a gin and tonic.

Setting the title aside, reading the article you realise that the “challenge” is actually an interesting experiment: Decanter takes a group of young men and women between 21 and 29, asks them to choose a bottle to spend more than usual on, and to share in their own words whether it was worth it.

The protagonist of this particular article is Amelia, 21, a Sociology student at the University of Aberdeen. She works in a whisky bar to pay for her studies and usually buys white or rosé wine for under £7 a bottle. For the challenge, she chose a Provence rosé priced at £18. It’s called Lady A – a wine with an eye-catching label featuring copper details and a graffiti-style butterfly on the front.

Amelia drank the wine with her boyfriend before a university karaoke night. And then she turned the bottle into a candle holder.

Reading this story, we came to a few conclusions.

1. Aesthetics shouldn’t be an afterthought

Amelia writes it without embarrassment: she chose Lady A for purely aesthetic reasons. Not for the grape variety, not for the terroir, not for the score. For the packaging.

One might think: “how shallow.”

Not really – especially if you walk into any Italian supermarket and take a look at the labels on the wine shelf. Packaging that is, genuinely, shallow. Generic, predictable, a little flat, often far too serious.

Lady A has copper details and a graffiti-style butterfly. Elegant, says Amelia. Minimal. And it costs £18 instead of £7 – so the packaging had already done half the work before the cork was even pulled.

2. Gen Z doesn’t drink alone on the sofa: they drink in company

Amelia didn’t open Lady A by herself to unwind after a day of lectures (as a Millennial would probably have done after a day at work). She kept it in the fridge for the right occasion: Krakatoa Karaoke, the most popular university night out in Aberdeen among alternative students. She shared it with her boyfriend while they got ready together.

So much for those who keep insisting that young people no longer go out, no longer meet up, no longer share things. Amelia goes out, meets up, shares. And she doesn’t do it with a wine just to take part in Decanter’s “wine challenge.” **It’s worth remembering: the challenge is to buy a more expensive wine than usual – not to buy wine when you’re used to drinking something else entirely (water, Coca-Cola, and so on).**

For Gen Z, wine is a social object tied to a specific moment, a particular occasion.

This is something the industry should urgently internalise: wine for Gen Z is not a product for daily or solitary consumption. It’s an occasion-based object. And occasions can be created.

3. Packaging designed for an occasion

There’s a detail in Amelia’s story that might seem minor at first glance – but isn’t. The Krakatoa Karaoke night had a theme: Valentine’s Day. In that context, the Lady A rosé “seemed like a perfect fit,” Amelia explains, for that specific evening. Not because someone had told her so. Because she sensed it herself, through the colour, the aesthetic, the name.

This opens up an important reflection: packaging conceived for specific occasions, limited editions tied to events or

celebrations, communications designed for particular contexts – these are not merely promotional tools. For a young consumer who hasn't yet developed loyalty to any particular brand, these are elements of emotional recognition that create a connection between the product and the moment being lived.

4. How Amelia describes the wine

Amelia doesn't know the technical vocabulary of wine, and it shows. But more than that – she says so herself, clearly: she's not an expert in grapes, tannins, "or that sort of thing."

And yet, when she describes Lady A, she manages to communicate everything that matters: she calls it fresh, fruity, refreshing, with flavours of peach and berries. And above all, she manages to explain it in a way that anyone can understand – industry insiders and complete newcomers alike.

This should serve as a permanent reminder for anyone who communicates wine professionally: making wine understandable doesn't mean dumbing it down.

5. The bottle's second life: sustainability that isn't greenwashing

The Lady A bottle is now covered in solidified wax drips on Amelia's table. It has become a candle holder. And this, she says, was part of her thinking from the start: buying something beautiful and reusing it after it was empty felt like doubling the benefit of spending more than usual.

There's a lesson here too. Sustainability in wine is discussed constantly – but almost always in the language of certification (organic, biodynamic, low-impact, carbon neutral). A vocabulary that doesn't mean much to Gen Z, or at least no more than any other product claim.

What actually works – and what Amelia demonstrates without even realising it – is a concrete, everyday kind of sustainability: objects that outlast their initial use and find a second purpose. Packaging that has a life beyond the wine is a far more powerful communication argument than any green label.

The challenge shouldn't be convincing Gen Z to drink wine

Amelia's Wine Challenge isn't a story about persuading young people to drink wine. It's a story about a 21-year-old who chose a bottle for the way it looked, shared it with her boyfriend on a special evening, found that the higher price was justified by what was in the glass, and then turned the empty bottle into a decorative object for her flat.

At no point in this journey did Amelia need anyone to convince her to drink wine. **She needed to find a bottle beautiful enough to want to buy, good enough to justify the cost, and well-designed enough to give it a second life.** Perhaps that's exactly where the conversation should start.

Key points

1. **Packaging and aesthetics drive Gen Z purchase decisions** before taste or origin
2. **For young consumers, wine is a social, occasion-based** product, not a daily habit
3. **Accessible language about wine is more effective than technical jargon**
4. **Reusable packaging resonates more with Gen Z than sustainability certifications**
5. **The industry shouldn't convince Gen Z to drink wine** –

just make better products