

Wine sells less when it tries to sell: the lesson from distilleries

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There is a commercial paradox that wine still struggles to grasp: **selling works better when you teach, accompany and move people**, and when the sale itself stops being a declared moment. Whisky and gin distilleries understood this long ago. They built a model of hospitality that works, in effect, as a commercial war machine: it engages, enchants, and for this very reason sells far more than a traditional tour. It is worth understanding why.

The invisible point of sale

At the end of a distillery tour, visitors naturally find themselves in the shop. Nobody has told them “now buy

something,” and there is no explicit pressure. But after smelling, tasting, listening to stories and touching raw materials, the propensity to buy is so high that **selling becomes almost superfluous**. The tour has already done all the work.

In many Italian wineries, the model is still the opposite one: tour first, tasting after, and the shop presented as a separate moment, where the visitor perceives pressure to buy. **It is the exact opposite of what works.**

The hierarchy that drives customers away

Behind this problem lies a deep cultural root. The wine world, in Italy in particular, was historically built on a hierarchy: those who know and those who do not, the sommelier and the tourist, the serious taster and the person who “drinks without understanding.” This attitude, once seen as protecting tradition, **today represents one of the main commercial barriers of the sector.**

A tourist who feels judged does not return, does not tell others about the experience, does not buy. **A tourist who feels accompanied, instead, takes the bottle home, shows it to friends, and becomes a free sales channel.**

Distilleries solved this problem upstream: a well-structured tour works for the ten-year-old child playing with the scratch-and-sniff card, for the teenager fascinated by historical figures, for the occasional adult who discovers they can tell apart aromas they never thought they could recognize, and for the expert who appreciates the technical level. **Everyone takes what they need, and no one feels treated like a beginner.**

The child who becomes a customer in

twenty years

There is an even more radical aspect in the distilleries' model, and it is the way they treat their youngest visitors. A child, obviously, does not taste whisky, and receives a non-alcoholic drink in place of the dram. But **the child receives it with the same ceremony reserved for adults**: takes part in the story, chooses a favorite aroma, goes home with a gadget and a tale to tell at school.

Italian wine, on average, treats children as a logistical problem to be managed during the visit. Distilleries treat them as future customers, and involve them from the age of ten, without ever letting a minor taste alcohol, simply by including them fully in the cultural experience. **It is a strategic lesson about the long term, in a sector used to thinking about the single visit.**

Distilleries made this leap about thirty years ago, when they stopped being factories open to visitors and became cultural destinations. Italian wine has superior raw material in history, terroir, product complexity and cuisine to pair with. **What is often missing is the mental disposition to consider oneself, first of all, a hospitality sector, and only afterwards a production sector.**

Does your tour sell, or does it get chosen?

Key points

1. **Sell without asking**: distillery tours make the shop a natural final step, with no explicit pressure.
2. **Separate shops** in many Italian wineries create perceived pressure, the opposite of what works.
3. **Feeling judged** makes tourists leave without buying,

while feeling accompanied turns them into free sales channels.

4. **Design tours for everyone:** from children to experts, each visitor takes what they need.
5. **Include children** as future customers and think about the long term, beyond the single visit.