

How France and Italy are redrawing the wine market in the USA

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 4 Aprile 2024



“If cannot convince a client to buy a wine bottle worth 10\$ at the supermarket, who will your client be in 20 or 20 years from now?”. With this certainly provocative question **Curtis Mann**, one of the most notorious and influential Master of wine in the USA (Vice-president of Albertson/Safeway for wine, beer and spirits), intervened on March 7th during the 11th Edition of the Wine Conversations, the conference organized by Diam (the well-known French society specialized in closure) at The Culinary Institute of America, in Greystone, in the heart of the Napa Valley, California.

Mann’s intervention – as it has been written by the [winebusiness.com](https://www.winebusiness.com) – it’s not only an alarm bell, but a true

invite at reviewing the market strategies, especially in front of the increasing interest towards imported wines in the USA, in particular those coming from Italy and France.

An encouraging message from the American Master of wine, also for our wine industry that sees the USA as a strategic market of great relevance.

Mann discussed the need for the American wine industry to become more accessible to younger and less affluent demographics, and therefore to focus on **“affordable luxury”**. Bottles in the price range of 11 to 25 dollars, predominantly wines imported from Italy and France, have shown, in fact, according to Mann, the **greatest growth** in wine sales in 2023.

Before Mann's intervention, in the introduction to the conference, the Master Sommelier, **Evan Goldstein** MS (CEO of Full Circle Wine Solutions), had reassured the 130 producers present that, despite a 2023 not particularly positive for the wine market in the USA, according to the United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, consumer spending was still on the rise last year, with **\$223.5 billion** spent off-premise and another **\$162 billion** in on-premise sales. Not to forget, Goldstein emphasized that American consumers seem still very enthusiastic and eager to visit wineries, tasting rooms, and wine bars.

These are certainly encouraging signs compared to the sometimes overly grim news that reaches us here in old Europe.

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In the current context, therefore, the wine industry faces a clear dichotomy: on one hand, the need to maintain a stamp of **luxury and exclusivity** that has always characterized the sector; on the other hand, the urgency to make wine an accessible pleasure to a broader and younger audience.

The solution presented by the experts at the conference?

Focus on “affordable luxury”, a price range that fluctuates between \$11 and \$25, where wines imported from Italy and France are experiencing exponential growth.

Why this shift towards imports? Mann’s answer is as simple as it is enlightening: consumers are looking for quality but at a price that does not excessively burden their wallet. Italian and French wines, with their rich history and intrinsic quality, position themselves as the perfect choice for those who wish to explore new wine horizons without sacrificing their bank account. The analysis of the vice president highlights a 3% decrease in domestic markets in their multi-outlet (MULO) share, with a downturn in purchases of almost all types of domestic wine in favor of an increasing interest in imports.

But what does all this mean for American national wine producers, particularly those in Napa Valley, traditionally associated with luxury labels and high prices?

Mann does not hesitate to emphasize a critical point: the wine industry must urgently revise its approach, abandoning the presumption that the customer must automatically approach the world of luxury wine. Instead, it’s time to meet the consumer, offering products that meet their needs and desires, starting with greater transparency on labels and clear information on calories, allergens, and the use of animal products.

Wines imported from Italy and France are paving the way towards a future where quality and accessibility can coexist, challenging domestic producers to rethink their positioning. To secure a place in the wine landscape of the coming decades, the industry will have to embrace change, focusing on innovation and inclusivity.