Why do I say yes to non-alcoholic wines

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 13 Giugno 2024



While my opinion on non-alcoholic wines may not count, I still want to express it because I believe it is appropriate for all industry professionals to make an effort to evaluate the pros and cons of this choice.

But already in saying yes or no there lies a **paradox**, a contradiction, as non-alcoholic wines have long been a reality regardless of what any of us may think.

This does not mean that it is pointless to reflect on the opportunities that this type of wine may bring to our viticulture sector, but precisely because it is already a reality, I believe it is better to have a constructive rather than destructive vision.

In this latter direction, the astute English journalist Robert

Joseph comes to our aid. In an article by James Evison in The Drink Business magazine, he highlighted nine good reasons why the wine industry should unreservedly accept non-alcoholic wines.

I do not want to cite all nine of Robert's "reasons," although I agree with them all, but I will limit myself to considering those that I find most relevant and on which I also have a clear **perception** because they concern more economic and marketing aspects rather than technical issues.

Read also: And what if, in addition to not voting and not going to church, young people don't drink wine either?

Starting, therefore, from what I believe to be the most complex and controversial aspect, that is the quality of non-alcoholic wine. On this topic, in March 2022, I wrote an article with a very direct title: "I tasted low-alcohol wines and did not like them."

In the past two years, I have had the opportunity to taste many non- and low-alcohol wines, and I must admit that the quality level has increased, although certainly, new technologies will need to be awaited to have more interesting quality profiles.

But on the quality front of non-alcoholic wine, I fully embrace today Robert Joseph's observation that can be summarized as follows: non-alcoholic wine does not try to be the equivalent of a good alcoholic wine but offers an alternative **option** for consumers. Joseph draws a parallel with decaffeinated coffee, which does not directly compete with regular coffee.

It is precisely this parallelism with coffee that, in my opinion, should help us understand the value and role of non-alcoholic wine, freeing us from the obsession that if non-alcoholic wine is not up to par with alcoholic wine, we must reject it outright.

Thus, non-alcoholic wine forces us to look at and respect consumer desires, something that is not always in the wine producers' wheelhouse.

For this reason, I believe that, once again, for the umpteenth time, non-alcoholic wine forces us to be interested in consumer needs and not always and only in what we industry insiders like.

It is no coincidence that if you read all the current analysis and outlook reports of the wine industry, a common denominator emerges that can be summarized as follows: innovation and adaptation to new trends are fundamental keys for resilience and development of the industry.

Today, more than ever, it is crucial that the Italian wine scene has the strength to accept the challenges of innovation that, in any case, have allowed our sector to grow and evolve in the past.

Innovation and adaptation are, therefore, factors that inevitably lead to having no ideological **prejudices** against non-alcoholic wine.

I am therefore more concerned today about the slowness with which our viticulture sector is approaching (though it would be more correct to say not approaching) this opportunity.

I am aware of some experiences that, leveraging international know-how, are moving in this direction, and when I have more detailed information, we will report it on Wine Meridian. But already the fact that they must currently move "with their lights off" speaks volumes about the inexplicable reticence on the production front of non-alcoholic wines.

It would be paradoxical for the Italian wine scene to become dependent on other countries for this type of product.

I want to add that I absolutely do not think that non-

alcoholic wines will reach particularly evolved market shares; they will almost certainly remain a small niche but in a market that is, and will be increasingly, made up of small niches, losing it would be foolish.

It is equally clear that, while agreeing with Robert Joseph – according to whom we should not be obsessed with the quality level of non-alcoholic wines – the higher their quality, the better their development and image, as well as their **positioning**.

And it is clear to everyone that in this regard, viticulture suited to this type of production must be developed, starting with varieties suited for making respectable non-alcoholic wines. Some examples in this regard already exist, and we must therefore observe the good examples and not just the negative ones.

In conclusion, taking up once again the thought of the talented Robert: banning non-alcoholic wines or even not calling them wines would be like prohibiting vegan hamburgers.

For the record: I will never drink non-alcoholic wines. Because even in the unfortunate event that, for medical reasons, I was forbidden to consume wine, I would prefer to stick to a good glass of fresh **water**.