

Spirits are racing, wine is lagging: maybe the consumer isn't the problem

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Wine consumption is declining globally, particularly in the US, while spirits sales are booming. This article argues that the problem isn't health trends or economics, but the wine industry's outdated and inaccessible communication. Spirits are winning by connecting with modern lifestyles, while wine remains complicated and self-focused.

We've been telling ourselves the health-conscious fairy tale for too long. We've told ourselves that the decline in wine consumption depends on the economic crisis, market saturation, the no/low alcohol trend. **And yet, one honest look at the data from the world's top market – the United States – is enough to understand that perhaps this is just a convenient alibi.**

In 2024, according to the Distilled Spirits Council, spirits reached 42.2% of the American alcoholic beverage market, surpassing beer and leaving wine stuck at 15.8% – the lowest share in the last 25 years. **This isn't a cyclical downturn: it's a solid, coherent trend built on strategy, appeal, new languages, and new consumption occasions.** In the meantime, wine still talks about itself with the same words it used thirty years ago.

While RTD (ready-to-drink) cocktails grow by almost half a billion dollars in a single year, we continue to celebrate terroir as if it were a universal concept. **While tequila and vodka become the stars of urban nights, we wonder if the drop in sales depends on the labels or the alcohol content.**

The point isn't to sing the praises of alcohol – that would be ridiculous. **But hiding behind health-consciousness as the main cause of wine's decline is an intellectual shortcut that no longer holds up.** Low or no-alcohol alternatives are still numerically marginal today. Few people like them, they have little penetration in strong markets and, with rare exceptions, they are not changing the habits of the majority.

And so there is only one question: why are spirits so popular?

The answer is (also) about communication. Spirits have learned to hybridize with lifestyle, to speak the language of young people, to show up on social media, to link themselves to mixology, music, design, and creative contamination. **Wine, however, insists on talking about itself – not who drinks it, not when, not how.**

Spirits simplify, wine complicates.

Spirits invite, wine demands.

Spirits make you feel part of a world; wine quizzes you on

origins, traditions, denominations, vertical tastings, and vintages.

And all this, which for us is culture, for many is simply inaccessibility.

If the USA wasn't enough, the data confirms it elsewhere:

- In the **United Kingdom**, gin experienced such a strong boom that it warranted a specific tax.
- In **Canada**, according to Spirits Canada, premium distillates have grown by an average of +9% annually since 2019, while wine has seen a steady decline.
- In **Australia**, spirits producers are experiencing a golden age with strong growth in the craft segment, so much so that the government recently increased promotional funding for liquor exports.
- In **France**, the homeland of wine, domestic consumption of whisky has surpassed that of red wine among young adults for years.

So let's stop kidding ourselves.

It's not the millennials' fault. It's not the climate's fault. It's not the liver's fault. **It's our fault.**

Or rather: it's our responsibility.

Because if we want wine to start speaking *with* society again, and not just *about* itself, we need the courage to rethink everything: the languages, the narratives, the experiences.

We can no longer ignore the fact that those who choose what to drink today are no longer just looking for a product, **but an identity to recognize themselves in.**

And perhaps, to do this, we will finally have to step outside

our wine-centric enclosure. And learn something, maybe, from those who today, like it or not, are winning the perception game.

Key points

1. In 2024, US spirits market share (42.2%) beats wine (15.8%).
2. Blaming health trends for wine's decline is a convenient alibi.
3. Spirits simplify and connect with lifestyle; wine complicates and demands knowledge.
4. Wine's communication is "wine-centric" and fails to engage new consumers.
5. The wine industry must rethink its language to connect with society.