

USA: discovering the unexplored potential of the world's largest wine market

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 24 Maggio 2024



Recently, an interesting article was published on Wine Searcher titled "[US Consumers Turn to Italian Wine](#)".

Last year, to give you an idea, four of the five **fastest-growing red wines** on the recently closed Drizzly platform were all Italian: Brunello di Montalcino was the bestseller, followed by Corvina, Nerello Mascalese, and Nerello Cappuccio respectively.

However, Kathleen Willcox's article highlights that this "**return**" of passion of US consumers for Italian wines is based on different factors than in the past. And it is these factors that should guide a new approach to communication and

promotion of Italian wine in the world's largest market.

In the United States, where wine consumption reaches **34 million hectoliters** annually, making it the world's largest consumer of wine, Italian wine continues to be a cultural and commercial benchmark. With nearly 50,000 Italian restaurants scattered across the country and an Italian-American community of 16.8 million people, the roots of Italianity are deeply embedded in the American social fabric. However, it is essential today to ask ourselves: are we doing everything possible to intercept and develop the potential of Italian wine in this vast market?

Innovating for Growth: Beyond Tradition

The **charm** of Italy, often represented by images of "La Dolce Vita", high-class fashion, and iconic cinematic settings, has certainly played in favor of the importation of Italian wine, with sales last year alone reaching \$1.8 billion. However, there is an urgent need to renew marketing and communication strategies. The stereotypical message of Italy anchored in clichés and past values no longer seems sufficient to fully capitalize on the opportunities of an evolving and increasingly demanding market.

"There is a growing interest in native varieties, and even emerging wine consumers have the desire to explore after having some experiences with Italian reds," Wine Searcher quoted Annie Edgerton, a wine and spirit educator at Flatiron Wines & Spirits in Manhattan. "More and more people," Edgerton continued, "are also looking for **hidden gems in Italy**, and are using the larger wine regions and more well-known wine types as a starting point."

Jonathan Kleeman, director of beverages for the Story Group and chief executive sommelier, finds that Brunello "**sells itself**", while other high-level options – like wines from Burgundy (he says softly) – are increasingly out of reach

except for a 1% elite.

Marco Prete, co-founder and owner of the high-end wine import shop Wines of Kings in Portland, Oregon, also noted in the Willcox article a steadily increasing interest in premium wines based on Sangiovese, Corvina, and Nerello.

"There has been a steady improvement in the quality of wine from the specific areas associated with these grape varieties – Tuscany, Veneto, and Sicily," Prete highlighted. "Moreover, US collectors are looking beyond Napa Cabernets and Bordeaux blends. We receive a lot of **positive feedback** from our customers about these wines."

Prete also theorizes that a general love for all things Italian – and the growing popularity of cocktails like the **Negroni and the Spritz** – may also be a driving factor of the trend.

"There is a renewed focus on the **country** and the **quality** and **authenticity** of the products that are made there," Prete concluded.

Advanced Strategies for an Evolving Market

But if what Wine Searcher states is true, here are some possible strategies to intercept this renewed interest in Italian wine:

- 1. Diversify the offering:** Despite the success of wines like Brunello di Montalcino and Amarone della Valpolicella, it is essential today not to limit ourselves to already known denominations. Exploring and actively promoting lesser-known wines could satisfy the growing curiosity of Americans towards unique and innovative products.
- 2. Targeted and modern communication:** Implement marketing

strategies that use digital platforms to tell authentic and contemporary stories of Italian wine, overcoming clichés.

3. **Strategic collaborations:** Work closely with Italian restaurants and Italian-American communities to promote tasting events and educational campaigns about different types of Italian wine.
4. **Sustainability and innovation:** Highlight sustainable and innovative viticulture practices, such as those adopted by producers who have introduced new rootstocks suitable for warmer climates and avant-garde winemaking techniques.

An Opportunity Not to Be Missed

The Italian wine industry has an extraordinary opportunity for **growth** and renewal in the US market. Through a more dynamic and unconventional approach, it is possible not only to increase sales but also to further elevate the image of Italian wine, making it a symbol of innovation and superior quality.