What I learned visiting 138 wine companies in the USA

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 28 Agosto 2023



At the beautiful Moma in New York there is a **painting by Benny Andrews with the title "No More Games"**. I chose it for the cover of this editorial that I am writing while in the plane flying back home from the long and tiring "USA Wine Tour 2023".

It is a strong painting which, according to me, well represents the United States and, despite being made in 1970, it still expresses **the image of a Country which is big in every way, even in its contradictions and in its conflicts.** I think it is important to remind that, even when highlighting its limits, America does not hide its contradictions and conflicts, instead it blabs them on your face without much

discretion.

With the same shamelessness I would also like to try and tell, even in brief, what I learned visiting 138 cellars in the USA, **traveling 12.000 Km by RV, crossing 23 different States.**

First of all I learned that, in the USA, wine is made almost everywhere, even in wine producing areas that are not always suitable. **Some of these areas became "suitable" for viticulture thanks to its climatic mutations that transformed areas with freezing climate into territories where vine is developed more or less respectably**. It is useful to underlined the "more or less" since territories such as Arkansas, Missouri, Indiana and Kentucky – talking for the sake of the so-called Midwest – became wine producing territories thanks to grapes bought in other States (in particular in California and Washington State).

However, it is interesting to highlight how this "run towards wine", after two centuries from the mythical gold rush, was brought by the interest developed in wine tourism. If there were not wine tourists, just to be clear, **I doubt that in many areas in the USA there would be wine cellars.**

Americans are very pragmatic: if they develop an industry it is only because there is a business opportunity. **I talked with some producers and many wine managers made in USA and none of them mentioned "passion" or "viticulture history and culture of the territory" among their choices.** I could summarize the motivation of their wine-entrepreneurial choice in this sentence: "We sell almost all of our production to those who come visit us at our company". And believe me when I say that I saw the truthfulness of this affirmation first-hand.

So, undoubtedly, **the most important thing that I learned in the USA is that wine can be produced in non-suitable areas,** but this is not an impediment because almost all the production can be sold to wine tourists.

More in general, it can be said that the so-called “DTC” (Direct to Consumer”) is, without any doubt a trend in constant growth in the USA and **all the companies that we visited confirmed this goal of “de-intermediate” more and more their sales.**

All of this teaches us a lot even to our viticultural model and, if **I think that in terms of qualitative suitability we beat the USA 10 to 0,** it is easy to think about the added value that our wine tourism proposal could have.

But the teachings do not end here.

The American cellars do not sell just wine. Yes, I already read all of the many objections on our social channels on the merchandising topic: “we risk to give a wrong image of the product and of the company”; “**Our laws do not permit it**”, etc., etc., etc.

We will deal with this topic shortly in a wider and detailed mode but, at least for the moment, can we try and not have ideological prejudices? **The same applies to wine tourism and food service:** I know well all the objections on this front too, but I think that clamming up upon principle is a mistake regardless.

Here, the USA taught me once more that “movement freedom” is an extraordinary thing and, obviously, it is also dangerous. **But, avoiding everything that can be dangerous also means to stop being entrepreneurs.**

I learned, and this surprised me a lot, that **the majority of American cellars do not give a damn about communication or, even, about wine journalism.**
I try and explain myself better by answering a question that we were often asked by those who generously followed us through our socials during these 5 weeks: “how were you welcomed in the cellars that you visited?”. Some of the cellars, almost 30%, knew who we are because we previously

planned our visit with the company’s management. To all of the others we explained who we are and what were the goals of our visit.

The result in all of this is that **less than 10 of the cellars demonstrated to be happy or, at least, to be curious of having wine journalists paying a visit.** We were treated not more nor less than a “normal” other visitor.

At first, I cannot deny it, I was surprised, not because I expected golden gates, but because I thought that it could be interesting for a USA cellar to have an Italian journalist able to review their reality. But, gradually seeing this “disinterest” manifesting in almost every company we visited, **I understood once more the great American pragmatism:** if my company lives by wine tourism, how many of my visitors will these Italian journalist be able to “bring”?

Moreover, **there is also the great limit of presenting the companies by a manager that often only recite a script.**

The absence of the company’s founders or highly prepared manager was noticeable even in the super developed American wine tourism. **It is a topic, this last one, that for us in Wine Meridian became a true mission.**

After more than 4 years of tour that brought us around Italy and around the world, we think we acquired the most useful and operative information to give our precious contribution to the wine tourism development in our country. **We are ready, are you?**