

Wine, culture, and a question that gives me no peace

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 15 Luglio 2026



This reflective essay explores why wine is losing its cultural relevance among new generations, arguing that the industry keeps talking mostly to itself instead of rethinking its place in modern life. Drawing on research from Bordeaux and thinkers like Pauline Vicard, the author calls for a new, more honest narrative around wine and culture, rooted in care rather than status.

There is a question that has been turning in my mind for months: how do we, who work in wine, make it still relevant in the eyes of those who should be drinking it? I am not talking about volumes, nor exports, nor the next report with its green and red arrows. **I am talking about something simpler and in some ways more uncomfortable: today, why should someone who does not already drink wine start doing so?**

And when I try to answer honestly, I realize I do not have a good answer. **I realize above all that our world, for the most part, is not even asking itself this question.** There is one truth I struggle to hear spoken in our field: an era has ended.

And until we truly say it, until we accept it fully, we will keep writing “new” things while keeping our eyes fixed on the rearview mirror. It is a reassuring and completely useless exercise. **We change the words, we leave the convictions intact.**

I confess it: at this stage I find no peace. I keep hearing the same things, at the same conferences, in the same magazines, said by the same people, with the same fear of change. **I too belong to the same group described above, and I do not want to appear different from what I am.**

But that fear of looking at reality is not caution, it is an increasingly real danger. It leads us astray, it makes us burn precious energy defending positions that society has already stopped granting us. While we tell ourselves that communicating better will be enough, outside our own rooms wine is losing something that no campaign can recover: the silent consent of those who, until yesterday, considered it a natural part of their own lives.

I keep studying, seeking out new ideas, comparing notes with others. And I must admit one thing: never before has there been so much genuine effort to make us reflect. **The problem is that too many of these ideas remain there, underestimated, filed away as “interesting” and then forgotten on Monday morning.**

I will mention one, because it struck me. At the Cité du Vin in Bordeaux, during a conference, research was presented on French consumers and on how they perceive wine drinkers. Three portraits emerged, all male. The successful manager who always

orders "the best." The bon vivant who loves life and therefore wine. **And the embarrassing uncle, the one who drinks too much and makes the table uncomfortable.**

I lingered a long time on this, because it is unsparing: until yesterday the first was a model to aspire to and the second a compliment. **Today the manager in a suit who shows off status is almost pitiful, and the bon vivant slides dangerously toward the embarrassing uncle, because excess is no longer a rite of passage but a fault.**

In other words, for a twenty year old, approaching wine means either dressing as an out of time elite, or risking being seen as someone who overdoes it. **Neither option resembles a desire.** And we keep talking to them about vintages and terroir.

Then there are the reflections of Pauline Vicard, of Areni, which in my view should be hung on the wall of every winery. **One in particular put my thoughts in order: wine has never survived because it was useful.** It has survived because for thousands of years societies chose to consider it part of culture, of hospitality, of collective life.

If you reduce it to its substance, wine is alcohol, it is a non essential agricultural product, it is water and labor in an age that counts its resources. **Only its status as a cultural asset has guaranteed it a tolerance that went beyond all this.**

So I ask myself: what are we concretely doing to earn that choice once again? Because the feeling is that we are doing exactly the opposite of what would be needed. **There is one thing, again from Areni, that opened my eyes: the equation of desire, visibility, desirability, purchase.** In this order. First wine must be seen by many, then desired by some, finally bought by few.

We start from the end. We put almost all our energy into the

last link, speaking to those who already know, already drink, already buy. Trade fairs, competitions, specialized press, events for the usual crowd. We communicate very well with ourselves and we are surprised that outside, no one listens to us. **But culture is not formed at our trade fairs.**

It forms elsewhere, in music, in food, in sport, in the places and stories where people live, and in those other places wine today is almost absent, or if present, is only a faded or predictable backdrop at some sports award ceremony.

Then there is a misunderstanding we have carried with us forever. We know very well how to defend the cultural value of viticulture: the vine, the landscape, the UNESCO nominations. It is a rural story and we tell it with pride. **But unfortunately very few people encounter wine among the vine rows.**

Almost everyone encounters it, or should encounter it, in the city, at the table, in front of a friend, on some ordinary evening. **Yet if wine disappeared from our cities, a piece of sociability, of hospitality, of conversation would disappear too, but we almost never tell this part of the story.** And perhaps that is exactly where relevance is at stake, not only among the precious vine rows.

The last point, perhaps among the hardest to accept for someone like me who grew up inside this world, concerns the word “excellence.” We have tied it to price, to investment value, to status, exactly the attributes that today often make wine unlikeable. **But “culture” and “cultivation” come from the same verb, colere: to take care of.** To grow through care.

If excellence then went back to meaning this, care for the land, for those who make it, for those who will drink it, it would be a truer story, and infinitely more desirable than the one we tell through price lists, awards, and status.

I have no recipes, and I distrust those who have them ready

made. I do hold one conviction: that the world of wine must stop treating cultural relevance as an extra, a coating to add at the end, and start treating it as the strategic priority it actually is.

It will take curiosity. It will take imagination. And it will take the most uncomfortable thing of all: the courage to question some of the convictions that for decades have told us who we are. Because people do not defend what they do not value. And they do not value what they no longer recognize as part of their own lives.

For now, I keep carrying that question with me. It seems the least I can do.

Key points

1. **Wine's cultural relevance is declining** because the industry keeps addressing only its existing consumers.
2. **Younger generations see wine as either elitist or excessive**, with no appealing model in between.
3. **Wine survived for millennia as a cultural symbol**, not because it served any practical purpose.
4. **True excellence in wine should mean care for the land and people**, not status or price.
5. **Rebuilding relevance requires courage to question old convictions** and reach audiences beyond the wine world.