

Wine and Generation Z: how we transformed wine culture into snobbishness

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The wine industry faces a crisis: 67% of Gen Z doesn't feel represented by wine communication, with 49% associating it with snobbishness. The problem isn't young consumers—it's professionals who've replaced accessibility with exclusionary jargon and rigid rituals, transforming a product born from earth and community into an intimidating symbol of elitism.

A few weeks ago, I was at BT0 in Florence, Italy's leading tourism event, as a speaker to discuss the relationship between wine and Generation Z. In this complex moment for the wine sector, many questions arise, and we turn our attention to young people to understand how to decode them.

In my presentation, I shared data from a survey conducted by Wine Tourism Hub that explored in depth how those born between 1997 and 2012 perceive the wine world. But while preparing the presentation, I realized the question was wrong. We don't need to decode young people. We need to decode ourselves.

The elephant in the tasting room

There's a jarring contradiction in this data that immediately struck me. When we ask Gen Z what they think about wine, the first words that emerge are territory, nature, culture. Beautiful, right?

But then, digging deeper, we discover that 49% associate wine with snobbishness. Almost half. More than those who associate it with conviviality.

Let me say this clearly: there's an identity problem. Italian wine is a child of the earth, of hard work, of collective labor. It was born in the calloused hands of farmers, in harvests done together, at Sunday dinner tables. How did we manage to transform it into a symbol of snobbishness?

The answer lies in the 58% of young people who are afraid to approach wine because they perceive it as "a world for experts." In their words: "It seems like you need to have a special vocabulary to talk about it."

We've built jargon, a code, a liturgy that excludes instead of includes. And we did it in the name of quality, competence, respect for the product.

But where did respect for the drinker go?

The tyranny of "the right way"

During my presentation at BT0, I shared a phrase that particularly struck me: "I never know what to choose, I'm afraid of making a bad impression." This phrase haunts

me. Because when someone is afraid of making a bad impression drinking wine, it's not the consumer who has failed. It's the producers.

We've created a system where there's a "right" way to drink wine. Exact temperatures, specific glasses, codified tasting sequences. And sure, technique matters, competence is important.

But when technique becomes a barrier to entry instead of a tool for deeper understanding, we have a problem.

56% of young people tell us that wine communication is snobbish or antiquated. 67% don't feel represented. They're not the ones who need to adapt to our language. We're the ones who need to ask ourselves why we're speaking a language that two-thirds of potential consumers don't understand or, worse, don't want to understand.

I'll conclude with a phrase that encapsulates an important message: wine should be like a grandmother telling you a story, not like a professor giving you an exam.

Key points

1. **49% of Gen Z associates wine with snobbishness**, more than those linking it to conviviality
2. **58% fear approaching wine because it seems like "a world for experts only"**
3. **67% of young people don't feel represented** by current wine communication
4. **The industry created barriers** through technical jargon instead of welcoming newcomers
5. **Wine should be like a grandmother telling stories**, not a professor giving an exam

