

Wine, connections, and the right time for change

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 25 Dicembre 2025



As 2025 concludes, the wine industry faces a permanent shift toward structural complexity. To survive, wineries must abandon outdated “educational” models and embrace hospitality, inclusivity, and authentic emotional connections. By moving from a production-centric approach to one based on listening and co-creation, the sector can transform current market challenges into sustainable growth opportunities.

As 2025 draws to a close, it has undoubtedly been one of the most difficult years for our wine sector. No one knows exactly when this phase will end. And it is probably wrong or illusory to imagine that this “complexity” is merely cyclical because by now, it seems quite clear that it will be a constant in the future.

To be honest, living with complexity means accepting that we have entered the professional league. A league that, with equal honesty, we must admit much of our wine sector and many of our companies hoped to avoid. For many years, we were the team that preferred to stay in the amateur league rather than invest economic and human resources to enter professional competition. And we were comfortable there, it's useless to deny it, to the point that for over thirty years we thought that good intuition and a few excellent relationships would be enough to sell wine forever.

We woke up from that beautiful dream a while ago, realizing that a superficial approach and the lack of in-depth marketing and market skills are enormous limits that no company can afford anymore. We realized this for a very simple reason: the recipes of the past no longer work.

Taking note of this hasn't been easy, and there are still some in our world who cannot find peace with it. There are more than a few entrepreneurs and managers in the wine world who still rebel against the idea of having to change. They know well that things will never return to the way they were, but instead of evolving—even through small new choices—they remain paralyzed in their old positions.

Fortunately, there are also those who have not only understood this new course but are equipping themselves to face it with the right tools and strategies. It is right to highlight this; otherwise, we risk giving the dangerous impression that “there is nothing to be done” or that our sector is at the “mercy of a cruel fate.”

Regarding the latter, a producer recently wrote me a “heartfelt” email imploring me to “tell the truth,” to say that “the apocalypse was near for wine.” I hope it is clear that this is an isolated voice, yet it made me reflect further on how this climate of fear—sometimes fomented by unsuspected industry insiders (often representing flourishing companies

taking home significant OCM resources)—risks generating “monsters.”

Ultimately, history has taught us how fear is the best tool for generating dictatorships, single-mindedness, and dangerous dependencies. I believe we are, fortunately, still far from this danger, but we cannot be naive; therefore, it is good to prevent any form of spreading unjustified fears.

I have written it before: being an optimist does not mean thinking everything is fine (that is stupidity), but it means always being predisposed to searching for solutions to problems. And if I think about the current problems of wine, there is no doubt that there are still many solutions available—many of which, it must be said, we have not yet thought to utilize or activate.

In our small way, by telling winning stories and collecting daily testimonies from those constantly on the market, we try to show that new solutions not only exist but are also yielding significant results. Our “challenge,” launched several years ago—to invest more in hospitality and direct relationships with the final consumer—is part of building new strategies for the economic sustainability of our businesses.

On this front, things are undoubtedly improving, but with equal honesty, it must be noted that we need to hurry up. In my opinion, the pace is too slow, and there are still too many Italian wine companies (not just small ones) that might be aware of the need to better develop their hospitality but remain undecided on what to do.

Often, this indecision is dictated by the wrong idea that being stronger in one’s own home is a sort of step backward, a return to the past “when wine was sold in demijohns in the cellar,” as a producer told me some time ago. Nothing could be more wrong. If there is something modern, in line with the current expectations of consumers worldwide—starting with the

young—it is precisely living authentic experiences, including the so-called “wine experience.”

In this direction, our beloved wine world must open up without further resistance to the beautiful challenge of inclusivity and co-creating a new way of approaching wine with final consumers. It is time to declare the era of “wine education” closed—which was so precious and indispensable for many years—to open up to the era of “emotional connection” and “co-creation” with consumers of many new experiences of pleasure, conviviality, and well-being.

If the model of the past—as recently noted by the talented Australian journalist Priscilla Hennekam—was “Produce → Pack → Educate,” today it is crucial to move to **“Listen → Connect → Co-create.”**

Therefore, this hierarchical, top-down conception—where a leader or a great expert must educate you on what to drink, how to drink, and when to drink—must end. **Today, connection is no longer a tool... it is the product.**

But to create connections, we must finally analyze the new and real needs of our “customers.” This is a job that our wine sector has not only never done but has always considered unnecessary. Well, even this last wall must be torn down; let us go and get to know our many potential customers ourselves, because no one, at this point, can benefit from it more than we can.

And if there is an ideal time to talk about connections, it is precisely Christmas. For this reason, I wish all our readers and the many who live and operate in this sector—which remains one of the most beautiful in the world (it’s good not to forget that)—a peaceful Christmas full of connections.

Key points

1. **The wine industry faces a permanent structural complexity** that requires professional investment rather than amateur intuition.
2. **Outdated business models are failing**; companies must overcome paralysis and resistance to embrace necessary evolution.
3. **Economic sustainability depends on direct hospitality** and authentic wine experiences that resonate with younger global consumers.
4. **The sector must transition from an “education” model to one focused on listening, connecting, and co-creating.**
5. **Emotional connection is no longer just a marketing tool**; it has become the core product of wine.