

Francesco Saverio Russo: the real influencers? The winemakers who tell their story, their choices, their territories, and their wine without compromises

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Francesco Saverio Russo advocates for winemakers to share their stories authentically, emphasizing sustainability, the impact of climate change, and evolving consumer tastes. His approach to wine communication is rooted in ethics and a deep connection to the land. He also addresses the rise of digital communication and the potential role of artificial

intelligence, while advising winemakers to avoid greenwashing and stay true to their values.

The production areas, the concrete sustainability, the future-oriented approach to wine: Francesco Saverio Russo's goal isn't to focus on individual wineries but on what they represent in the broader context of a territory, a rural culture that must inevitably relate to the rapid transformations due to climate change, social and economic perspectives, and the evolving preferences of the market and consumers. This is a vision we wanted to explore through this testimony, created as part of the "[Amorim Wine Vision](#)" project.

How would you define your approach to wine communication, and what are your core identity elements?

It may sound trivial, but it's not at all, I've based my work on ethics, and I believe it has been a rewarding choice. I've delved more into agronomic matters than enological ones, and simply put, I speak more of territory and vineyards than of product. What I'm recognized for is also my presence in the production areas, the travel component that takes me across Italy.

What are the main goals you set for yourself as a wine blogger and what are the primary factors that guide your choice of producers and wines you write about in your blog?

The ethics I mentioned earlier is something I now use pragmatically. I don't want to work for a mere "do ut des," my narrative of wine has never been subordinated to commercial dynamics. In recent years, I've almost stopped writing about

individual wineries; I focus on the production areas, sustainability, and a future-oriented approach to wine. I look for realities that allow me to talk about broader themes like climate change, tangible prospects, and the evolution of consumers.

For evolution, I'm not talking about trends but about taste curves, and I realize that some producers are better than others at anticipating certain changes without compromising their identity. The idea of contemporary wine must take into account certain realities; the market demands wines that age less in wood and more in the bottle (the analytical values induced by climate change are affecting the evolution of wines in barrel), that express themselves best in 2-3 years with a strong territorial connection and aim for elegance with an easy drinking dynamic.

This doesn't mean giving up on longevity, but simply acknowledging what is happening and what Italian producers could interpret with great sensitivity and balance. Other contexts worldwide are showing that adaptation is necessary, and some wines are struggling to maintain the standards of the past in terms of longevity and harmony due to disparities between maturations (technological, phenolic, and aromatic) and outdated regulations.

How do you view the relationship between wineries and the digital world? What attitude do you notice from winemakers?

Covid-19 was a catalyst in terms of digital and communication, and in Italy, we were lagging behind in these aspects. The willingness to show oneself more freely with means that weren't previously considered useful, such as video calls, has increased, and they continue to be useful in terms of optimizing time, organization, and meetings.

Today, there is a desire to tell about one's work in the vineyard, the techniques, the winemaking processes, and even bottling (which is scarcely discussed in universities). As for wine marketing, it has taken off at the top (industrial realities, large-scale distribution, big e-commerce) but has been slow to catch on in the lower levels (small and medium-sized agricultural companies).

I think the winning factor is “putting your face out there,” and I recommend that producers who want to do marketing avoid direct marketing, relying on pseudo-influencers or self-proclaimed marketers (there are agencies and marketing experts who are certainly more useful when setting up a promotional campaign for the launch of a new wine).

We need to tell our own story, our choices, and our approach from vineyard to cellar, but there is still too much focus on the bottle as an exclusive luxury item, stripping away many of the values it holds. In this regard, I still see a lot of cutting-edge approaches where people drink more of the label than the content, and a lot of superficiality in the communication done on social media (of course, I'm not talking about communication from the producers). I would like to see producers expose themselves personally, take a stand on certain dynamics, and not fuel them. I think this process is already happening to some extent, and the new generations are crucial in raising the perception of wine through social media and the web.

How do you see the evolution of wine communication in relation to artificial intelligence? What are the pros and cons of these innovations?

I was a bit hesitant about the use of artificial intelligence; I'm afraid it could flatten the narrative if used at the

editorial level. In any case, I don't think AI is capable of delving into the world of wine as much as someone working in the field. I've run some tests, but I see that the results are unsatisfactory, and the gaps are obvious. Caution and awareness are factors that need to be considered when interacting with AI.

However, it will be interesting to use it to realize that we, the professionals in the field, are a small circle that risks convincing itself that what is said and heard within the circle is reality, even outside it. Often, we're not in tune with global wine trends. When questioned about this, AI often highlights that we miss the main topics. That said, AI can certainly be more useful in the field and in the cellar to develop technical solutions and increased certainty, reducing the reliance on empiricism, also in terms of sustainability and reducing chemical additions.

Do you think winemakers can become the new wine influencers? How do you think social media can influence interactions between producers and consumers?

The winemaker is the only one who can convey certain information, and I think it's quite understandable. The figure of the wine influencer cannot be identified with that of a marketer, but it can be a critic or an independent communicator. I repeat, in my opinion, the person who makes wine is the most suitable to talk about their work and the territory where their vines are rooted.

This communication becomes even stronger and more impactful if carried out in a cohesive and joint manner. A clear example is Fivi (Federazione Italiana Vignaioli Indipendenti), which started with a handful of producers and today has an increasing impact both with consumers and institutions.

Can you tell us about a particularly emotional or significant moment you've experienced thanks to your involvement in wine communication?

I'll tell you an anecdote about what happened last week with the rain and hailstorm that hit parts of Langhe, Roero, and Monferrato. Driving up to Rodello, where I was supposed to give a masterclass, I saw vineyards flattened, and all I could do was remember that a similar situation, almost 20 years ago in a dear friend's vineyards, had led me to begin my path as a wine writer. The commitment, work, and sacrifice that hide behind this world were the spark that ignited my interest and my desire to give a voice to the winemakers and tell the territorial dynamics starting from the vineyard.

What advice would you give to young people who want to embark on a career in digital wine communication?

I always enjoy hearing from young, enterprising people who want to start communicating wine online, but I realize that I had the fortune to start when there were few of us. Today, it's harder to stand out. The central issue is finding your own identity, not in excess, but in quality, which can only be achieved with study and experience. I don't think it's enough to just tell the story of the bottle. It's essential to engage with the winemakers and start from the vineyard, which I believe is the cornerstone of wine communication. I understand that from an economic standpoint, it's easier to create social profiles and sell "promotional packages," but producers are becoming more attentive and less naive. They are growing and increasingly focusing on the quality of content.

Greenwashing is a threat to the credibility of wine communication and the reputation of companies. What, in your opinion, are the best practices for authentic and responsible communication in the wine sector?

I don't think small and medium-sized wineries are deeply embedded in the greenwashing trap; their sustainability is evident and verifiable. When referring to large companies, certifications and agronomic and enological approaches must come into play and should be communicated more pragmatically and less romantically. Furthermore, I still see "self-made wines," "naturalness," and "salubriousness" of wine on brochures and websites... There should be stricter regulations on the use of certain terms that can be very misleading. Today, what is not done is more important than what is done, as long as it is demonstrated that "nothing is done" with awareness and technical knowledge, not negligence. The much-discussed "subtraction" is something that should be highlighted and communicated in a simple but not trivial way, showing that it is possible to remove and still achieve greater expressiveness and better convey varietal and territorial identity.

It's important to make it clear that the winemaker's work has no standard protocol, no prepackaged recipe, it's a search that must be adapted to a series of variables, with the harvest being the first.

This interview was conducted in partnership with [Amorim Cork Italia](#) as part of the "[Amorim Wine Vision](#)" project – a network of thought leadership on technical and topical wine-related issues, spotlighting the original visions of industry entrepreneurs and managers.

Key points

1. **Winemakers should share their stories authentically**, without compromises.
2. **Sustainability and territorial connection** are essential for contemporary wine.
3. **Digital communication and AI** are transforming the wine industry, but caution is needed.
4. **Greenwashing is a threat**, and authenticity must guide wine communication.
5. **Wine influencers should be winemakers**, not marketers or pseudo-influencers.