Young generations don’t reject fine wine, they reinvent it

scritto da Veronica Zin | 22 Luglio 2026

Data from 2025 and 2026 challenge the idea of a wine-averse young generation. Gen Z and Millennials are drinking more, not less, and increasingly turning toward fine wine. Lower frequency but higher spending per occasion is reshaping the premium segment, while gender gaps and cultural intimidation remain key barriers to address.

Recent data suggests that young consumers are not abandoning the world of wine at all, but are approaching it differently. The narrative of new generations uninterested in wine is now well known, but what happens if, in reality, that narrative were, at least in part, wrong? **Perhaps the real question to ask is not “why are young people abandoning wine?” but “how**

are they redefining their relationship with it?"

As reported in the Wine Enthusiast article "*Gen Z and Millennials Are Here to Save the Wine Industry, If It's Willing to Listen*," **the share of Gen Z adults who say they consumed alcohol in the last six months rose from 46% in 2023 to 70% in 2025.** This is not a marginal figure: it is the largest change recorded among all generations over the same period, according to IWSR data.

And what about Millennials? According to the Wine Market Council's 2025 Benchmark Consumer Survey, **they have become the demographic group with the highest share of wine consumers in the United States: 31% of the total, compared to 26% for Baby Boomers**, who had led the ranking until 2023.

According to one of our articles, "*Giovani e vini pregiati: una liaison controcorrente*" **auction houses are also recording a growing number of clients between 28 and 40 years old with disposable income to spend on fine wines**, a phenomenon considered atypical in a sector that for decades had almost entirely coincided with a clientele over 50.

So where has the "abstinent generation" gone? It probably never existed in the way it was described. The overall decline in volumes has largely economic causes, the price bracket under 15 dollars has been under pressure for years, while the 15 to 30 dollar bracket holds steady, and cultural causes in the subtlest sense of the term: **consumption occasions have changed, not the openness to wine itself.**

If consumption frequency decreases but people are willing to spend more per occasion, which wine category benefits? **The answer is almost obvious: the fine wines segment.**

Sophie Burleigh, Head of Operations at Cult & Boutique Wine Management, put it clearly in an article published in Wine Industry Advisor titled "*Younger Generations Are Reshaping Fine Wine, Not Rejecting It*": **"the trend of 'drinking less but**

better' could represent one of the biggest opportunities for fine wine." This is not an overly optimistic view, but the reading of someone who works every day in the wine investment market and in organizing educational experiences around fine wine.

Pauline Vicard, CEO of Areni Global, one of the most authoritative voices in the analysis of the international fine wine consumer, pinpointed this mechanism clearly (*Fine wines: l'evoluzione della categoria dei vini pregiati*): "Young consumers under 40, everywhere in the markets analyzed, are still a very important part. **The trend toward more moderate but higher value consumption can only benefit fine wines."**

But who really are the new under 40 consumers?

The Areni Global study "The New Fine Wine Consumer," presented at Wine Paris 2026, **sought to answer this question through research conducted in markets such as Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Hong Kong, China, and France.**

According to Fornelli d'Italia, in the article "*Vini pregiati: l'evoluzione dei consumatori e le nuove modalità di scoperta*" **the research focuses on people under 40 who regularly buy bottles priced above 65 euros**, the threshold recognized as the entry point into the high end segment.

The first myth the data dismantles concerns the role of family. The idea that fine wine culture is passed down mainly through the domestic context, almost as an inheritance, finds no support in the numbers. **Entry into the market happens far more often through friends and peers, in social occasions that stimulate curiosity and a sense of belonging.**

The discovery of fine wine is a social experience, not a hereditary one, and this has an important consequence: **the industry does not need to wait for a generation to "grow up with wine."** It has the chance to build the bond from scratch, if it knows how to do so.

There is also a figure that deserves specific attention, often overlooked when discussing new consumers: gender. Among under 25s, **female participation in the fine wine market is almost balanced, reaching close to 44%.** However, between 26 and 35 years old that share drops noticeably, and beyond 56 it reaches 13%.

It is not a matter of interest, many women say they want to buy fine wines, but of **access systems perceived as not very inclusive, overly technical language, and environments that do not always manage to make people feel in the right place.**

And this is also the central issue that Burleigh identifies in her article, one that anyone working to bring new audiences closer to wine knows well: intimidation. **Many young consumers perceive the world of fine wine as a club they were not invited to.** Not out of disinterest, but out of a widespread sense of cultural inadequacy: the “not knowing enough” that acts like an invisible wall.

CB Wine, Burleigh’s company, responded by creating CB Sessions, an internal educational format designed to bridge the gap between the pure tasting experience and formal qualifications such as WSET. **The goal is not to produce experts, but to build trust: turning intimidation into practicable curiosity.**

Key points

1. **Gen Z alcohol consumption jumped from 46% to 70%** between 2023 and 2025.
2. **Millennials now lead U.S. wine consumption**, overtaking Baby Boomers for the first time.
3. **Fine wine benefits as younger drinkers choose fewer but higher value purchases**.

4. **Social discovery, not family tradition**, now drives entry into the fine wine market.
5. **Intimidation, not disinterest**, keeps many young and female consumers away from fine wine.