Wine is no longer enough: the necessary awakening of the Italian wine industry

scritto da Fabio Piccoli | 24 Maggio 2024

Young people, including Italians, are increasingly disinterested in wine.

A factor that clearly emerges from the processing of Istat data by the Wine Observatory of Unione Italiana Vini.

The analysis provides a ruthless snapshot of current wine consumption dynamics, where young people are only marginally involved: consumers under 24 years old account for just **6.5%** of the total, compared to 30% of those over 65.

This data underscores a growing disaffection among young Italians towards regular wine consumption, preferring more sporadic and diverse drinking approaches.

Nothing new, to be sure, as we at Wine Meridian have been denouncing this disaffection for some time, which I believe is strongly, if not entirely, linked to our wine sector's difficulty in innovating, particularly in terms of communication.

On this last point, I highlight a recent experience that clearly showcased the ongoing poor communicative appeal of wine towards younger generations.

I recently attended an event aimed at young people between 18/20 years old, final-year students at hotel schools. The program included two tasting sessions, one dedicated to wine, the other to **mixology**.

The first was masterfully conducted by one of Italy's top wine popularizers, following the classic canons of professional tasting with extensive descriptions of soils, climates, vinification techniques, and maturation. For me, it was an excellent lesson that furthered my knowledge of some terroirs and wine types. But I was the only boomer in the audience, along with a couple of teachers, who were younger than me.

More than half of the students present gradually left the room, with only a small portion remaining attentive. To be fair, a couple of them were particularly attentive and stayed behind to ask the speaker further questions.

The situation was completely opposite during the cocktail tasting, where the presentation, significantly shorter, simpler, and more incisive, kept the students glued to their seats.

I don't want to appear demagogic at all, I realize that when comparing wine communication to that of so-called mixology, you're putting together two products that have practically only alcohol in common.

We are all aware that wine has values, more complex

characteristics, starting with the so-called **terroir**, which highlights factors that are far more articulated and diversified compared to a gin or tequila (even though it must be admitted that over time many spirits have enriched their value baggage).

I'm also aware of the fear that many wine communicators (wine critics, sommeliers, etc.) have of trivializing the communicative content of wine.

All true, but the end result is a communication that rarely (if ever, with very few exceptions) manages to be inclusive, democratic, capable of attracting the many "non-experts."

Anyone who has had the experience of entering a cocktail bar has had the pleasure, the thrill of feeling like a mixology expert within minutes. And this is even more true for younger people who inevitably shun anything that intimidates them.

I realize I have not highlighted anything original or unknown, but time is running out, and I have the feeling that our wine sector is afraid to innovate, to break rigid communication schemes, but also product innovation.

Most of the innovation in our sector is linked to changing a label. And even to make a "trivial" change of this nature often takes months if not years.

The current debate between pros and cons of non-alcoholic wines (which we will write about in detail soon) seems symptomatic of a sector that fears confronting the new that advances.

I know how important tradition is to wine values, but when it becomes synonymous with boredom, an inability to look at and accept reality, elitism, then I'm sorry to say we are facing **obtuseness**.

The National Gathering of the Alpini in Vicenza just ended.

The usual extraordinary wave of hats with black feathers invaded the beautiful Venetian town.

The wine intelligently offered by the well-known Vicenza cooperative Vitevis was a great example of “wine democracy,” with no snobbery, but an excellent demonstration of how wine can and must be a product for everyone and of everyone. And there were many young Alpini in Vicenza.