

FOOD AND DRINK /

How the resurgence of wine tastings transformed social gatherings

Posted by **Precious Adesina** • 5 days ago



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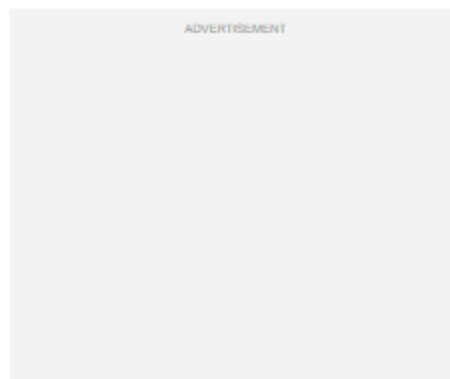


Long gone are the stuffy, exclusive masterclasses of the past and in their place are casual social gatherings open to all.

Once upon a time, wine tastings were associated with the most elite in society attending exclusive events where they sipped expensive vintages then spat into buckets.

Today, that is no longer the case. The new breed of wine tastings are relaxed and social events for people who want to learn more about what they are drinking.

“The main tastings that came before were from organisations like the WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust), who do fantastic courses, but what we’re trying to provide is an experience rather than an education,” says Holly Willcocks, the general manager at Half Cut Market, an up-and-coming independent deli and wine bar in north London. Holly has hosted tastings titled Brave New World, which focuses on experimental and progressive producers across the globe, and Natural Attraction, an introduction to natural wines.



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According to wine expert Jane Parkinson, part of the reason for the resurgence of wine tastings is that there are so many drink options for people to choose from.

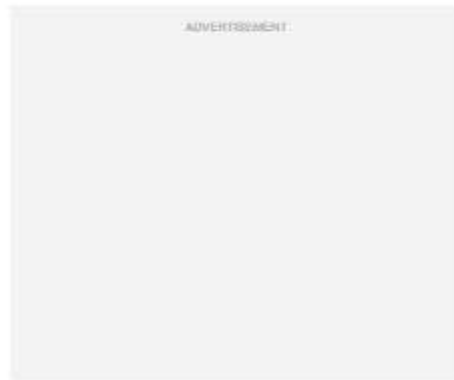
“The competition for wine out there is tough. It has to pit itself against not just other wines these days, but an ocean of dynamic ‘alternative drinks’, many of which are non-alcoholic too,” says Jane. “This has created a more enterprising tasting scene because brands and venues are trying to break through the noise of all those other drink options and draw the consumer’s eye to them.”



Wines at Trishna

Holly agrees. "We started doing wine tastings as soon as we opened. It was always something we wanted to do. We've sold out every time, so there is obviously a demand," she says. "We have wine tastings as it's a great way to connect with locals, to get to know what people like, and give them a reason to pop by."

“Wine tastings are brilliant social events when they aren’t a stuffy masterclass. Once you gain some knowledge, there’s always so much more to discover,” says Seamus Sharkey, head of wine at JKS Restaurants, Trishna’s parent company. The tastings look at rieslings from around the world, skin contact and natural wines, and up-and-coming winemakers. “It’s a dynamic and engaging series and a great chance to demystify and discover new styles of wine not usually found on Trishna’s menu.”



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Brodie Meah, the founder of [Top Cuvée](#) and [Cave Cuvée](#), a pair of popular natural [wine venues](#) in London, says their wine tastings sell out immediately. “We host at least one a month at our wine bar [Cave Cuvée](#), and they always sell out immediately,” he says. “It adds another dimension to a night out and works really well to do with just your partner, in groups, or with people from work.”

Both Brodie and Seamus say that the pandemic has also added to an increased interest in wine tastings. “During the pandemic, lots of people really got into wine. They had more money to spend to try new things and the ability to take their time and educate themselves in the comfort of their own home,” says Brodie. “Now places are back open, people still want to continue learning and expanding their wine knowledge, so it’s the natural progression that people want to attend tastings guided by experts.”

“After the past few years, people seem excited to get together around a communal table to engage with wine in a fresh and exciting way,” adds Seamus.



People are also more interested in what they are consuming and how it [impacts society](#), which is part of the reason the purchases of natural and organic wines have increased dramatically over the past decade. According to research commissioned by [Millésime Bio](#), a trade show devoted to organic wines, almost one billion bottles of organic wine are projected to be consumed around the world in 2023 - more than double what was recorded in 2013. “We can clearly see that our customers want to know more about what they consume, the origin of the products and even their environmental impact,” says Jules Bensacq, group head sommelier at the Chelsea wine bar [28°-50°](#).

It seems wine tastings are benefiting both the producers, providers and drinkers. “Hosting a unique wine tasting is super important for venues and wine brands, because wine massively trades on, and often depends on customer loyalty. So get this one themed tasting right, really tap into the vibe of that wine taster, and you could have a loyal customer for many more years, whether you’re making the wine or selling it,” says Jane.

But more than anything, it’s about the pleasure wine tastings bring to a diverse group of people, Holly says. “We mainly do them because I love wine, and I want to spread the joy - if I can pass on some of that enthusiasm, then that’s enough.”