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Brazil’s Eno Cultura Won Top Honors in All Three WSET Education Award Categories

The São Paulo wine school was the only provider highly commended for enterprise, student experience and social impact.

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São Paulo-based wine school Eno Cultura has received a rare distinction from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, becoming the only course provider to be highly commended in all three categories of WSET’s inaugural Excellence in Education Awards for 2026,

according to the London-based education body and the school.

The recognition placed Eno Cultura in the top tier of WSET's new awards program for Enterprise, Student Experience and Social Impact. WSET said the competition drew 110 entries from 28 countries and territories. The organization, founded in 1969, is an independent, not-for-profit awarding body that offers qualifications in wine, spirits, sake and beer through a network of more than 800 approved providers in over 70 countries.

The result gives unusual international visibility to a school operating in a market that has grown quietly but steadily inside the global wine trade. Brazil, with a population of more than 200 million, has become one of the more closely watched wine import markets at a time when consumption has softened in some established countries. Materials released by Eno Cultura, citing trade data, said Brazil imported 165.1 million liters of wine in 2025 worth more than $558 million, up 6.8% from a year earlier.

That growth matters beyond the import figures. Wine sellers, restaurant buyers, sommeliers and hospitality workers need training to explain regions, grape varieties, styles and food pairings to consumers who may still be building familiarity with imported wines. In that setting, education providers can have a direct influence on how fast a market develops and how much confidence consumers have when they move beyond a small group of well-known labels.

Eno Cultura was founded in 2013 by Thiago Mendes, who has become a prominent figure in Brazil's wine education sector. According to the school, more than 15,000 students have taken its programs over the past 13 years. The company operates from São Paulo and offers in-person, hybrid and online classes, with a focus on internationally recognized qualifications.

Mendes said the WSET recognition reflected a longer effort to build a professional culture around wine in Brazil rather than simply prepare students for exams. "We receive this recognition with humility and great honor," he said in a statement released by the school. "This achievement reflects our commitment to transforming lives through education and belongs to our team, educators, partners and students."

His own path into wine did not begin in the trade. According to background materials shared by the school, Mendes moved to London to study fashion and later entered wine education there, eventually completing WSET's Diploma-level training. In 2007, he became the International Wine Challenge's first ambassador for Brazil and Mexico. He returned to Brazil and opened Eno Cultura with the aim of adapting international wine education to local language, market conditions and learning habits.

That adaptation has been central to the school's identity. Instead of relying only on imported teaching models, Eno Cultura says it developed its own Portuguese-language course books and study materials, along with tasting kits, vineyard videos and classes led by visiting producers. The idea, according to the school, was to make technical content more accessible in a country where high-level wine education was still limited and often concentrated outside the region.

When Eno Cultura opened, advanced international wine study in Brazil often meant traveling abroad. The school says it helped stage the country's first Court of Master Sommeliers course in 2016. In 2019, it became the first WSET Diploma center in Brazil and in South America, according to the company. This year, it also hosted Brazil's first official introductory course from the Institute of Masters of Wine, another sign of how the country's wine education market has widened.

WSET's three award categories also point to how the organization now measures quality among providers. Enterprise covers the way a school builds and sustains its business. Student Experience looks at teaching and support. Social Impact focuses on widening access and creating broader benefits through education. For Eno Cultura, the social impact element has been tied in part to scholarship and access programs.

The school said that in 2025 its Wine for Life initiative, supported by the Gérard Basset Foundation, trained 50 hospitality professionals who might not otherwise have been able to afford certification. Another program, Sommeliers do Futuro, developed with WSET and Instituto Ser+, awarded 15 full scholarships and included 12 months of career guidance. Those programs helped place wine education in a broader workforce context, especially in hospitality, where formal qualifications can affect hiring and promotion.

Eno Cultura’s role in the market has also been shaped by its claim of independence from specific brands and importers. That matters in a country where producers and trade groups are trying to expand their presence and where educational events can easily double as sales platforms. The school says wines used in class are selected for teaching value rather than commercial relationships. That model has helped it bring importers, producers, sommeliers and consumers into the same space through master classes and professional tastings.

Brazil’s place in the global wine business has long been seen through production in the country’s south and through the size of its consumer base. What has changed in recent years is the speed at which professional education has expanded around that base. Retailers, restaurants and specialized importers now face a larger audience of consumers with some interest in origin, style and service, and a larger pool of workers looking for recognized credentials.

For WSET, the awards also highlight how much the map of wine education has shifted. The organization was built in Britain and spread first through traditional wine markets, but many of its fastest-growing opportunities now come from countries where wine is still a developing category. Brazil fits that pattern. While per-capita consumption remains lower than in many European markets, the combination of a large population, rising interest in imports and a growing service sector has made education more commercially important.

The Italian Trade Agency has described Brazil as Latin America’s leading destination market for wine and one of the most relevant markets outside Europe, according to the materials shared by Eno Cultura. That kind of positioning helps explain why international producers are paying closer attention to Brazilian buyers and why schools that train those buyers are gaining influence inside the trade.

Eno Cultura has previously received other industry recognition, including WSET’s 2017 Riedel Trophy for Educator of the Year and the 2019 French Wine Scholar Program Provider of the Year award, according to the school. This year’s WSET result, however, is broader because it covers business performance, classroom experience and access at the same time, placing a Brazilian institution at the center of an international conversation that has often been led by Europe, the United States and parts of Asia.