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Activequity Acquires Liberty Wines in a Deal That Reshapes Premium Wine Distribution in the U.K. and Ireland

Sogrape sold its stake, leaving the Master of Wine Fergal Tynan to lead a major importer serving restaurants and retailers

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Activequity has taken full ownership of Liberty Wines and installed a new leader at the British wine importer and distributor, a deal that changes control of one of the best-known businesses in the premium wine trade in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Liberty Wines said Activequity acquired all shares in the company, including the stake held by previous majority shareholder Sogrape. The company did not disclose financial terms. At the same time, Fergal Tynan, a Master of Wine and former managing director of Alliance Wine, has assumed leadership of Liberty Wines.

The move brings new ownership to a distributor that plays an important role for wineries seeking access to restaurants, bars, specialty retailers and other trade customers in the British and Irish markets. That means the transaction could matter beyond Liberty itself, because changes in ownership and management at a major premium wine merchant can affect producer relationships, portfolio strategy and routes to market for international wine brands.

Liberty said its business strategy will remain centered on quality and service and that Activequity will support and accelerate that approach. Activequity describes itself as a specialist firm focused on active support and equity solutions for the premium wine trade. In a statement released by Liberty, Activequity managing partner Alexander Bartholomew said the firm intends to back the business for the long term and preserve the elements that have made it distinctive in the market.

Tynan said Liberty’s priorities would remain its producers, customers and employees, along with the quality of its portfolio, its investment in wine education and the service standards for which the company is known. He also said the immediate focus is on supporting customers during Liberty’s busiest trading period. His appointment puts an industry veteran in charge at a time when suppliers and buyers are watching closely for signs of continuity after the ownership change.

The company said John Ratcliffe, a long-time figure at Liberty Wines, will continue as a long-term adviser. In the same announcement, Ratcliffe described Liberty as a special company and said he wished the team success in its next phase. The statement did not give further details on how management responsibilities will be divided or whether additional executive changes are planned.

Sogrape, which had been Liberty’s previous majority shareholder, said it would continue working with the company after the sale. Fernando da Cunha Guedes, chairman of Sogrape, said the wine group remained confident in Liberty’s future and looked forward to maintaining a close partnership as Liberty distributes Sogrape wines in the U.K. That continuing commercial relationship may help reassure producers and customers that at least some established supply arrangements will stay in place despite the change in ownership.

Liberty Wines is a significant operator in the higher-end wine market. According to the company, it imports more than 2,000 wines from around 400 producers and has particular depth in Italian wines. It also says it has strong expertise across the on-trade, which includes hospitality venues such as restaurants and bars, and the independent off-trade, which includes specialty retail. That mix has made the company an important intermediary between wineries and buyers in a market where premium positioning, education and service can be as important as price.

The company pointed to recent recognition as evidence of its standing in the sector. It said its portfolio won more than 100 International Wine and Spirits Competition medals in 2025 across 10 countries. It also cited several 2026 awards, including Drinks Company of the Year at The Drinks Business Awards, Trade Educator of the Year at the International Wine Challenge and Large Merchant of the Year at the Sommelier Wine Awards. Those distinctions, while promotional in nature, underline the scale and reputation of the business that Activequity has bought.

For the wider beverage industry, the sale highlights continuing investor interest in specialist distribution businesses that serve premium wine producers. In a fragmented market, ownership of a distributor with established producer ties, a broad import portfolio and deep relationships with restaurant and retail buyers can carry strategic value. Liberty’s new backing and new leadership now put the focus on whether the company can keep its existing partners while expanding its role in the premium wine trade in the U.K. and Ireland.