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Highlights from ProWein 2024

From vineyard robotics to no-lo wonders

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At the heart of Düsseldorf this past week, amidst the hum of excitement and the occasional challenge posed by rail strikes, ProWein 2024 unfolded into an event that not only celebrated the past and present of the wine and spirits industry but also peered into its future. Marking its 30th anniversary, ProWein has, over three decades, established itself as the premier global gathering for the trade, offering a unique lens through which the industry's pulse can be felt, tasted, and anticipated.

Despite the logistical hurdles, the fair's director, Peter Schmitz, remarked on the resilience and enthusiasm of the 47,000 trade visitors from 135 countries and the 5,400 exhibitors from 65 countries who made their way to the Messe Düsseldorf exhibition center. This slightly lower turnout compared to last year's figures—6,000 exhibitors and 49,000 visitors—did nothing to dampen the spirits of those in attendance. In fact, this edition saw an increased presence of top-tier executives, signaling a concentrated quality over sheer quantity.

ProWein's allure lies in its unparalleled range. It's a place where the entire world of wine converges—from the classic vineyards of Champagne to the emerging producers in Ukraine—offering attendees a kaleidoscopic view of the industry's global landscape. But ProWein 2024 wasn't just about wine. The introduction of ProSpirits in Hall 5 carved out a dedicated arena for the spirits sector, showcasing everything from the smoothness of Irish cream liqueurs to the bold flavors of Mexican mezcal, complemented by masterclasses and special tastings that enriched the experience.

Another noteworthy highlight was the ProWein Zero area in Hall 1, spotlighting the burgeoning low- and no-alcohol sector, aka 'no-lo'. Reflecting a shift in consumer preferences, especially among younger demographics, this area underscored the industry's adaptability and its keen eye on evolving market trends. The fair also became a platform for discussing innovations and challenges—like the use of robotics in vineyards, the pressing issue of drought, alternative packaging solutions, and the development of fungal resistant PiWi grapes—that are set to shape the future of wine and spirits production.

As ProWein 2024 wrapped up, it left us with a taste of what's to come, not just for the next year's gathering in Düsseldorf from March 16-18 but also for the broader industry landscape. With ProWine Tokyo on the horizon next month, it's clear that the conversations and connections made here will ripple across the globe, influencing not just what we drink but how we think about the beverages that bring us together.