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Bold steps needed for wine industry's survival

Journalist Julie Reux, dubbed 'Nostradamus of wine', highlights three major challenges

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Julie Reux

The future of the wine industry poses significant challenges, but it also offers avenues for adaptation that demand bold steps beyond traditional boundaries. Julie Reux, journalist and contributor to Vinofutur, has been delving into these issues, particularly

in her latest publication addressing the state of wine in 2072. Speaking during the November 8 colloquium at Bordeaux's Cité du Vin on "The Multiple Paths of Sustainable Appellations," she identified three major threats to the future of wine appellations. Her insights, though not meant to sound alarmist, have earned her the nickname "the Nostradamus of the wine industry" from Ronan Raffray, professor and director of the Master's program in wine and vine law at the University of Bordeaux.

The first challenge is climate change, which Reux describes as an inevitable disruptor. She warns that while wine production will continue, the structure of appellations as we know them may not. Researcher Jean-Marc Touzard from INRAe highlights that a global temperature rise of 2–3°C could spell the end of terroir wines. Current government projections estimate a 4°C increase in France by 2100, making adaptation urgent. This includes reconsidering practices such as AOC-specific grape varieties and irrigation, which was once taboo in appellation vineyards but is now being re-evaluated under mounting environmental pressures. Reux underscores that measures once seen as antithetical to terroir protection are now essential for its preservation.

The second issue is the declining influence of wine, particularly in France, where consumption has been waning for decades. According to INSEE data, only 11% of French people regularly drink wine, with a significant share being men over 55. Reux frames this not as mere "de-consumption" but as a shrinking base of wine advocates and enthusiasts. To counter this, she suggests disruptive innovations, such as low- or no-alcohol wines, which test the willingness of appellations to experiment outside their traditional confines.

Environmental concerns, including the goal of decarbonizing the industry and eliminating pesticides, represent a third major challenge. While pesticide reduction has been part of industry discussions for years, Reux warns that it remains an unresolved issue likely to resurface in public and regulatory debates. Hybrid grape varieties resistant to diseases like downy mildew and powdery mildew are one potential solution. Additionally, advances in New Genomic Techniques (NGT), which enable precise genetic editing without altering other characteristics of traditional grape varieties, are under consideration. These methods, though controversial, could align the industry with sustainability goals without sacrificing the integrity of classic wine profiles.

Reux also emphasizes the ecological footprint of wine packaging, particularly glass bottles, which she calls a significant hurdle in decarbonizing the industry. Current efforts to lighten bottles may delay addressing the core problem but fail to resolve it. She warns that as other industries adopt reusable packaging, the wine sector risks falling behind if it clings to outdated practices. This tension between tradition and innovation reflects a broader dilemma facing winemakers: the need to balance heritage with sustainability in an increasingly adaptive global market.

Whether her predictions come across as pessimistic or visionary, Reux's analysis calls for bold thinking and swift action to ensure that the wine industry not only survives but thrives in the decades to come.