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Port Wine Sales Drop 16% in a Decade Despite $970 Million Market and Premiumization Push

Producers turn to cocktails, tourism, and high-end bottles as younger drinkers favor lighter, lower-alcohol alternatives worldwide.

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Port wine, a fortified classic from Portugal’s Douro Valley, is facing a challenging period as global drinking habits shift. Consumers are increasingly choosing lighter, lower-alcohol beverages, leaving traditional Port—known for its richness and higher alcohol content—struggling to maintain its place at the table. Despite this, winemakers and industry leaders remain cautiously optimistic about the future, pointing to premiumization, tourism, and creative marketing as possible lifelines.

The global Port market was valued at $970.8 million in 2023 and is projected to grow at an annual rate of 5.3% through 2030. However, this growth masks a decline in volume: only 7.3 million cases were sold in 2023, down from 8.7 million a decade earlier. The drop reflects a broader trend away from heavy red wines and fortified styles, especially among younger drinkers.

Producers in the Douro Valley are responding with new strategies. They are promoting Port as an ingredient in cocktails and encouraging food pairings that go beyond the traditional cheese board. There is also a focus on premium products such as aged Tawnies and vintage Ports, which now account for half the value of all Port sales according to industry reports.

Ben Himowitz, co-CEO of Churchill’s, believes that Port is poised for a resurgence. He points out that age-wood Ports are the fastest-growing segment and that perceptions of Port are changing. “People are starting to think of it as an aged, crafted liquid that feels special,” he said in a recent interview. The move toward premiumization is evident across the industry but comes with challenges: as consumers trade up to higher-quality bottles, overall sales volume continues to fall.

The rise of craft cocktails has provided an unexpected boost for Port. Mixologists are using it in creative ways, highlighting its complexity and versatility. Himowitz notes that Port’s unique character makes it appealing both neat and mixed: “It’s not your average table wine or just a beer. It has that specialness and uniqueness of a cocktail but with more simplicity.”

Other industry figures echo this cautious optimism. George Sandeman, consultant at Sogrape, hopes that Port will shed its reputation as a holiday-only drink and become part of everyday occasions—perhaps even as a base for summer sangria. He predicts

continued growth for premium Ports and believes there will always be demand for vintage bottlings.

Still, Sandeman warns that growth may not be universal or immediate. While some markets like South Korea have shown interest in Port, others remain untapped. “It’ll be a shrinking category until it’s discovered,” he said, drawing parallels with Bourbon’s revival after years of decline.

Kit Weaver of Quinta de la Rosa sees potential in the partnership between producers and mixologists. He points to the growing popularity of White Port and tonic as evidence that new styles can catch on with consumers outside Portugal. Weaver also credits the global spread of Portuguese cuisine and culture—especially in cities like London—with helping to raise Port’s profile.

Tourism is another bright spot for the industry. Adrian Bridge, CEO of The Fladgate Partnership, expects demand for Tawny Ports to rise alongside Portugal’s booming visitor numbers. In 2024 alone, international arrivals increased by nearly 7 percent. Many tourists visit wine cellars in Porto or take part in tastings at innovative venues like Fladgate’s World of Wine complex or Symington’s new Matriarca townhouse.

Despite these efforts, some experts remain skeptical about Port’s long-term prospects. Richard Mayson, author and consultant on fortified wines, notes that market trends are still moving away from high-alcohol reds like Port. His advice to producers is simple: focus on quality—a strategy many have already embraced over the past two decades.

As the industry looks ahead, most agree that Port will likely continue to contract before finding new footing with future generations of drinkers. For now, producers are betting on innovation, tourism, and premiumization to keep this historic wine relevant in a changing world.