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Areni Global Report Reveals Outdated Beliefs About How Young Adults Become Fine Wine Collectors

Study finds peer influence and community drive engagement as industry faces gender gap and shifting cultural attitudes among under-40 buyers

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A new report from Areni Global, a fine wine think tank, challenges long-held beliefs about how people under 40 become interested in fine wine and start collecting. The research, which involved focus groups with senior trade professionals, surveys of more than 300 consumers, and interviews with both consumers and industry members, found that many assumptions about the next generation of wine lovers are outdated or incorrect.

Pauline Vicard, co-founder and executive director of Areni Global, explained that the study began with six hypotheses about how younger adults engage with fine wine. Only one was fully confirmed by the data; the rest were either disproven or only partially true. This suggests that producers, merchants, educators, and event organizers need to rethink their strategies if they want to attract and retain younger customers in a market facing economic and cultural challenges.

The report highlights a growing trend: more buyers aged 28-40 are entering the fine wine market worldwide. However, it also points out that demographic shifts, economic pressures, and changing cultural attitudes toward alcohol are creating obstacles for new collectors. These factors could limit future growth if the industry does not adapt.

One key finding is that family influence plays a much smaller role than previously thought. The idea that a love of fine wine is passed down through generations is not supported by the data. Instead, most people are introduced to fine wine through friends during a “defining moment” that sparks curiosity. Peer validation is crucial for turning interest into lasting engagement.

Social media’s influence also declines after age 25. According to the report, as people learn more about fine wine, they see social media as less relevant or even counterproductive for their interests. Instead, travel becomes an important driver of exploration for those aged 26-40. In the 31-40 age group, peers and relationships with merchants play a significant role in deepening engagement.

Community is another major factor in sustained involvement with fine wine. The report found that people do not automatically spend more on wine as their income grows; they need a sense of community to support their journey. Events and experiences that foster this sense of belonging are more effective than simply offering products.

The study also distinguishes between engaged buyers and true collectors. About 30% of people have a genetic predisposition to collect things, and for them, collecting fine wine is similar to gaming—it offers excitement, clear rules, progression, and flexibility. The desire to collect usually emerges between ages 26-35; if it does not develop by age 40, it likely never will.

A striking finding is the gender gap in fine wine engagement. While young women under 25 participate almost as much as men (44% women vs. 56% men), their involvement drops sharply in their 30s. By ages 26-35, female engagement falls to around 28%-29%, and by age 56+, women make up only 13% of fine wine enthusiasts. The report argues this is not due to lack of interest or commitment but rather systemic issues within the industry that fail to support women as their lives change.

Vicard emphasized that business models need to be redesigned to better fit women’s needs if the sector wants to close this gap. Around 43% of women surveyed said they were interested in becoming wine buyers but had not yet taken the step.

The report was produced in collaboration with Berry Bros & Rudd, 67 Pall Mall, and LVMH Vin d’Exceptions. Emma Fox, CEO of Berry Bros & Rudd, said understanding how consumers under 40 discover and connect with fine wine is essential for shaping the industry’s future. Mathieu Jullien of Vins d’Exception added that while declining alcohol consumption is not necessarily negative, it should prompt professionals to find new ways to engage younger audiences and encourage responsible enjoyment.

The findings suggest that if the fine wine sector wants to thrive in coming decades, it must move beyond old assumptions and actively address the needs and behaviors of younger consumers—especially women—by fostering community, supporting curiosity through travel and education, and rethinking traditional business models.