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Young Women Avoid Wine in Bars Over Drink Spiking Fears, Study Finds

University wine societies emerge as safe havens as hospitality industry faces pressure to address safety concerns for female drinkers

Friday, March 6, 2026



February 2026 brought several notable developments in the global wine and beverage industry, highlighted by new research, shifting consumer habits, and signs of optimism in key markets. At Wine Paris in early February, Areni Global presented findings from its report, The New Fine Wine Consumer: How people under 40 find their wine into fine wine. One of the most discussed topics was the concern among young women about drink spiking. Focus groups at university wine societies, such as the Bacchus Society at the London School of Economics, revealed that many female students consider these societies to be the only safe places to drink alcohol. The reason is trust—members believe their drinks are less likely to be tampered with compared to bars or clubs. Wine is seen as particularly vulnerable because it is often poured at the bar and then delivered to the table, creating uncertainty about what might happen in between. Some young women reported avoiding wine entirely during nights out due to these fears.

This concern is supported by data from the Global Drug Survey 2022, which included 7,607 respondents from 22 countries. The survey found that 2% had experienced drink spiking in the previous year, and one in five had been spiked at some point in their lives. Most incidents occurred in clubs and bars, and nearly 20% of those spiked in the past year also experienced sexual assault. These statistics highlight a significant safety issue for young women and present a challenge for the hospitality industry to address.

Another trend gaining momentum is the revival of American taverns. While British pubs continue to decline, taverns in the United States are experiencing renewed interest. Unlike traditional pubs, these establishments blend elements of bars and restaurants and are attracting top culinary talent. Chefs who previously worked at high-end city restaurants are moving to smaller towns to run taverns that focus on local ingredients and community atmosphere. For example, Sean Gray, formerly of Momofuku Ko in New York, now leads the kitchen at Sergeantsville Inn in New Jersey. Clare de Boer left her position at King in Manhattan for an 18th-century tavern upstate, where she serves dishes like venison and Sherry pie. This shift reflects a growing desire among Americans for familiar gathering places that foster a sense of community.

In Long Island, New York, a new neuro-psychopharmacology lab has opened with an unusual approach to research: volunteers will consume controlled doses of alcohol, cannabis, psilocybin, and MDMA under medical supervision. The goal is to study both

risks and benefits of these substances in a setting designed to mimic a bar environment. Researchers hope this work will lead to better treatments for psychiatric disorders and substance abuse while reducing stigma around psychedelics. Volunteers will be monitored closely as they enjoy snacks and entertainment before undergoing tests such as driving simulators to assess impairment.

Consumer drinking habits are also changing globally. According to Areni Global and the Bacardi Cocktail Trends Report, more people are choosing to drink earlier in the day or evening rather than late at night. In France, 51% of younger drinkers prefer earlier hours; in the United States, that figure is 34%. In the UK, dinner reservations now average just after 6pm, with only 2% booked after 9pm. The types of drinks consumed are evolving as well—aperitifs, spritzes, low-alcohol cocktails, and smaller formats are becoming more popular across countries like Spain, Italy, Australia, and India. Aperitif sales have grown by 8% annually from 2018 to 2023. Despite this shift toward moderation and earlier hours, there is still a demand for visually striking drinks that perform well on social media platforms like TikTok. In Spain, 40% of consumers say they would post a photo of a cocktail if the setting was extraordinary enough.

Finally, there are signs that China’s wine market may be entering a period of recovery after years of stagnation. At a recent Liv-ex fine wine conference in London moderated by Felicity Carter, Tom Burchfield from Liv-ex noted anecdotal evidence suggesting improved sentiment in Asian markets. Michael Saunders of Coterie Holdings explained that while overt spending remains subdued in cities like Beijing due to social concerns and past issues with low-quality wine flooding the market, there is optimism for future growth. Coterie Holdings recently acquired a Hong Kong distributor with offices across major Chinese cities in anticipation of renewed demand. Saunders emphasized that Chinese consumers have developed deep knowledge about fine wines—sometimes surpassing Western experts—and that even small shifts in demand could have significant effects due to China’s scale.

These developments reflect broader changes within the global beverage industry as it adapts to new consumer priorities around safety, community connection, scientific research into substances, evolving drinking patterns, and emerging market opportunities.