

Abstract

As a WSET Diploma in wine graduate, I encountered Natural wine. The topic was new and interesting. Motivated by exploring a new part of the wine industry, I dived into it and drafted my thesis about it.

The controversy behind Natural wines

The objectives:

- Understanding natural wine, the philosophy, and motives behind the movement.
- Determining if the movement is just a trend or if it will last.
- Clarifying why natural wines are 'taboo' in the wine industry.
- Analysing if it is just a response to customer's needs and desires or if it will stay, prosper, and increase even more in the future.

This Thesis will answer the following questions:

- How come natural wine is 'taboo' in the wine industry?
- Should the term be changed?
- Will we see natural wine in a century?

To do so, books, magazine articles and researches were explored.

A presentation of the thesis was done through an introduction, drawing the background and the steps taken to enlighten the subject. The thesis is then divided into four main parts, each looking at different actors of the industry.

Firstly, by interrogating the consumers to have their views on natural wines. A podcast on the subject was analysed to draw conclusions. The results are:

- Natural wine has become mainstream.
- Those who know about wine, have heard of Natural wine.
- Two main teams are outlined: the ones convinced who will not come back and those questioning, curious, sceptic.
- The context is that few people are concerned. Only 1.81% of winemakers are natural producers.
- Most people do not care whether a wine is natural are not.

Then, the winemaker's motivation to produce natural wines, the advantage and inconvenience it brings them was researched. The results are:

- The main motivation for winemakers is either coming back to traditions or putting emphasis on nature, by farming and handling the juice in a way that respects it more.
- The movement brought a wave of repentance from other actors in the industry. Spraying, sulphites, intervention have been reduced globally. Some even found other ways to heal their vines naturally.
- Many natural wines are rejected from their PDOs for not being typical enough for them.

- No certification is available to natural winemakers to authenticate their products.
- Only one label exists, but it is increasingly used and recognised by the industry's actors and by consumers.
- The change to Natural production takes time and investments.

The science behind winemaking was explored, with the help of Jamie Goode and his book *Wine science* (3rd Edition), published in 2021. The results are:

- The soil is rich and microbial life is important for vine's health. Herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and fertilisers harm it. The worst harm comes from copper sulphate.
- Yeasts are present in vineyards; they may even be unique to a region. However, commercial strains are persistent in the cellar, and they have been found in vineyards around the world as well.
- Even in inoculated fermentations, wild yeasts play a small role.
- Wild yeasts strains are being cultured and analysed by yeast producers to create a cultured wild yeast range they can sell.
- Sulphur can be harmful for a tiny percentage of the population.
- Sulphur can be forgotten during winemaking, but it requires careful monitoring and knowledge.
- Faults are ever present. They are hard to understand as each person has a different tolerance and some faults are still being researched.

Finally, the voice was given to professionals. The results are:

- Natural wine convinced a few, who then, sprayed the word, sharing and promoting the movement to bring awareness to it.
- Some question the movement. They point out we may be too much into this war. We must come back-to-basics: the individuals behind a wine; the processes used in the vineyards and the winery; the wine, its taste, and the feelings it brings.

To conclude, the controversy is still present today. The actors of the movement must prove they are different. They do it by denouncing modern processes. It created a rivalry between both which made it a 'taboo' subject. We do not talk about the changes it brought in the industry as a whole, or the recent studies it inspired.

'Natural wine' has been used for decades. It has grown to become popular, a brand in the industry. It is the trademark of the movement and as so, changing it would be stepping back and starting from scratch again.

As Alice Feiring says: "It is not going away; good taste does not go away." So, yes, as biodynamic, and organic wines have done, as now Low/No-alcohol wines are doing, Natural wine positioned itself as a new category in the wine industry. We see it now, we will see it tomorrow, in a decade and in a century.