



Grab your glass and salute the coming golden age of wine. Today there is more great wine being sold than ever before. But the tantalizing news is that it's not the high-end wine market that producers are targeting, it's the growing global thirst for great tasting wine at reasonable prices. Wine-makers have discovered that there are huge profits in making quality wine for the rest of us.



Wine sales are enjoying a global boom.

It's nothing short of a revolution and wine lovers around the world are lapping it up. Sales of liquor and beer might be flat but wine is enjoying a global boom; the growing middle-class in Asia and the former Soviet Union are helping to fuel a huge demand for wine while North America is about to surpass Europe as the biggest market the world.

All this should be good news for France, long considered hallowed ground for wine production. The French call their unique combination of soil and climate *terroir*, and for centuries have convinced the world that only they can produce truly fine wine.



Acres of rolling vineyards in France.

Thirty years ago they had a rude awakening when a few wine-makers from California bested top French wine producers in a blind tasting. The event is now called The Judgment of Paris and it turned the wine world upside down. When French judges at the Paris tasting realized they had judged California wines to be superior to some of France's best, they tried to change their scores. But it was too late the genie was, well, out of the bottle. The lesson; great wine can be made in other places besides France. What mattered is how it's produced.

Winemakers around the world were emboldened by the Paris tasting. Today, Australia, and California, have become acknowledged producers of world class wine. Chile, Argentina, and New Zealand are coming up fast.



Consumers have been voting with their wallets - for 'New World' wines.

In the face of growing competition from the New World, the French wine industry is struggling. Luxury brands from the storied Chateaux of Latour, Lafite, Margaux, and Rothschild are weathering the storm because of their pedigree in the collector category, but it turns out that the French had been producing a lot of plonk – much of it sold to North America. It's not surprising that when the California, and Australian full-bodied wines arrived consumers could taste the difference.

French wine-makers sniffed at the big, bold reds, from the New World, calling them "fruit-bombs" because of their strong fruit-forward tastes. They accused the upstart wine-makers of cheating; using technology instead of terroir, but consumers voted with their wallets. They like the soft, full-bodied texture, and the strong fruit taste. In short order Australian companies like Yellow Tail have enjoyed phenomenal success; their products are flying off the shelves while sales of French are still recovering from plummeting sales.



Grapes - soon to become wine - ripening in the sun.

Back in the land of terroir, millions of litres of French wine is being converted into industrial alcohol, and thousands of hectares of vineyards have been torn up. The French are cutting production in a belated effort to improve quality and become more competitive in the mid-priced wine market. It's all good news for wine lovers around the world.

Along with the phenomenal growth in wine production and sales is an explosion in wine appreciation. Wine is being celebrated on a scale never seen before. Wine clubs, wine tours, wine appreciation classes, internet wine chat rooms, all point to a growing wine mania sweeping the globe. Along with this comes new, more relaxed attitudes. Forget the old style wine snobs, today it's all about wine-geeks and a young generation of wine lover who prefers taste to pedigree. The hunt for good wine at reasonable prices is changing the wine world forever. When Hollywood stars and major league sports heroes start buying vineyards you know wine has cast off its elitist mantel and has gone mainstream.



Canadian comedian Dan Aykroyd surveys his latest investment, a winery in Ontario's Niagara region.

Yes, you can pay thirteen-thousand dollars for three magnums of 1961 Chateau Latour, and the other Grand Chateaux are doing a brisk trade in the luxury wine market, but increasingly it's a new generation of young wine-makers who are grabbing the attention, and the big scores from critics. Hand-crafted vintages made by small wineries are growing in popularity and new wine-makers are achieving near cult status.

And while critics continue to drive the market, their role is increasingly being challenged. There is a growing attitude among wine-lovers to start placing a greater trust in their own opinions and their own palate. There is as much passion and romance surrounding wine as there ever was, it's just that now there are so many more ways to express it. The revolution is a success. Call it the democratization of the wine kingdom. We can all drink to that.