

“Give the young responsibility and they’ll bring new ideas and a fresh perspective to the current tired formula”

Sexy bartenders vs sober somms?

Perception is everything in the battle of the elite drinks purveyors, so it’s about time we factored “cool” into wine’s appeal, says **Christopher Cooper**

Become a bartender – it’s cool, it’s creative, it’s sexy and it’s a hugely social environment where you’ll meet lots of other cool people (some of whom you’ll probably end up sleeping with). You’ll create your own signature cocktails, maybe own your own bar one day and even take part in super-fun kick-arse competitions in some super-sexy places.

Or maybe you would like to become a sommelier? Studying huge textbooks of out-of-date and opinionated crap, spouted out in dreary prose by some tweedy, beardy (but not in a cool way) and out-of-touch Master of Wine? Listening to hours upon hours of lectures with droning MWs waffling on to you about Chablis, malolactic fermentation or why 2006 was a challenging year in Nuits-Saint-Georges? (Yawn!)

It’s dull. More than dull, it’s totally dullabolical! Or at least, that’s what the general perception is.

I can tell you from personal experience that being a sommelier is an incredible career choice. A job that’s super luxurious, a shedload of fun, massively rewarding and one where you get to taste some of the most expensive bottles of wine ever. And you’ll probably even get your end away in the wine cellar; so to be honest, it’s a pretty cool career, really!

And by the same token, being a bartender can be as boring as batshit – long hours, making nothing but gin and tonics all night, fingers cut to shreds and stinging from lemon juice, forever setting up and breaking down the bar, cleaning rotas, constant fruit flies and having to deal with (your nemesis that is) the coffee machine. It can be a really shitty job.

So the perception of sommeliers and



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Does bartending earn more cool career points than wine waiting?

bartenders in the outside world and among the potential thousands of possible hospitality recruits is pretty obvious – so much so, that it’s clear the wine industry needs to start analysing itself rather than what’s inside the glass, if it is to be sustainable.

Wine careers in the on-trade are simply not attractive, as future generations are asking themselves: “Why should I train to become a sommelier when being a bartender is much more sexy?”

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Generation wine

There’s so much excitement in and around bars at the moment. Cool spirit brands are creating innovative and fresh ways of engaging people with their brand – so why wouldn’t you want to take part? Cocktail competitions are the dogs bollocks. Beer is super sexy and craft beers are really pushing the boundaries of creativity. Wine simply has to start to compete and show off its sexy side if it’s going to attract the next generation of sexy wine people.

The next generation (mostly Generation Y) are a very clued up bunch of people with highly tuned bullshit detectors. Armed with the world’s knowledge and opinions at their fingertips, these potentially revolutionary employees are fully aware of their career paths in wine, drinks and hospitality; and are making fully informed lifestyle choices.

These are the future cool-factor

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“Wine training has to be dynamic and inspirational, and delivered by credible individuals”

training needs to capture that and enhance potential candidates' love for wine, rather than put them off.

Yes, let's send our cool and fresh uncorrupted recruits over to a standard in-house training team! Would you want to send your rough diamonds over to one of the dreary established training schools? Yes, these training facilities might be good and the quality of lecturing can also be good, but good is no longer good. Good is standard, good is average, good isn't good any more. Good is not great, good is boring – good is in fact bad!

Wine training has to be dynamic and inspirational, and delivered by credible and inspiring individuals. Yes the establishment may have knowledgeable MWs or a leading figure in the wine industry, but are they delivering the best educational product that's properly targeted towards its audience? Are the attendees excited and inspired by their training?


If not, then is anyone doing anything really exciting? Is there anything cool and innovative in wine education?

Some UK wine suppliers and restaurant groups are currently leading this charge, creating market-leading and inspiring drinks education for their clients and employees.

Companies such as Bibendum, Liberty Wines, Jascots, Gaucho, Corbin & King and Jamie Oliver are a few that all have a common ethos. They all keep inspiring training in house, which means that they can not only control the content of any training but also control the delivery, which is equally if not more important in achieving information retention and creating inspiration.

So come on wine educators... we can do better than this. Winemakers create shitty wines without their audience in mind and TV programmes bomb unless the potential viewer is considered, so why shouldn't it be the same for drinks training? Tailor to the audience and not to the product. Most wine education has been created to simply make people learn about a product rather than inspire them. Unfortunately, most wine education is stale, old-fashioned, dreary and dull.

The wine industry and wine education as a whole needs to raise its game and be a bit more considered. This way, we can bring sexy back into wine in the on-trade, and beat the bartenders at their own game. **ii**



Does wine education need an injection of excitement and dynamism?

contestants, so how can we attract them? Can we make a wine career cool? Or at least make it as competitive in their minds as the beverage and bar industry?

To do so, we need to start to embrace and encourage the youth (Generation Y), not only as regular employees but in key roles and creative positions. Give them the responsibility and they'll bring new ideas and a fresh perspective to the current tired formula. We should be showcasing and honouring our fresh new wine talent, as well as raising the profile of cool wine jobs and potential career paths, to inspire recruitment into the industry.

Companies should also be actively promoting their ethos and ethical outlooks, as increasingly it's not just about the job any more – potential employees want to believe in your brand and want to achieve something more meaningful.

There are so many more things that we can do in order to make wine in the on-trade cool again: wine competitions that are as crazy and fun as their bartending counterparts, promoting entrepreneurship, ditching the starchiness of wine experts, reinventing the sommelier. Luckily many of these things are already on the way, so bring on 2016.

Innovation in education

However, there is nothing sexy about wine education. We do all we can to make the industry appear more cool, yet when the next generation are on board and we need to start training them, we've lost them already.

Wine education needs to be sexed up to be more inspirational or else there's no point. There's definitely glamour and wow factor in a wine career so therefore wine