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Painting, Sipping and Selling Wine

Wine companies are reaching new consumers, particularly young women, at paint 'n' sip events



Photo by: Paint Nite

Paint 'n' Sip events, such as this Paint Nite evening, let attendees have fun together and sample various wines.

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227

3

21

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One of the biggest shifts in wine in the past decade has been the increasing diversity of places to buy it. Who predicted 10 years ago that Starbucks would be selling Sauvignon Blanc? But the most unusual new sales opportunity for wineries may be the growing number of fun-focused events at which consumers can taste wines while channeling their inner Renoir (or Bob Ross). Paint 'n' sip classes are enjoying a wave of popularity, and they're giving wineries a chance to reach new consumers, particularly young, educated women.

A medley of paint 'n' sip classes began appearing around the country under various franchises about a decade ago, and the concept has expanded to classes offering drawing, ceramics and even craft-making. Most often marketed as a fun girls' night out, these classes (usually costing about \$35) take place in art studios, restaurants and retail locations. Typically, attendees sit in rows painting an image, under the laid-back tutelage of an art instructor, while enjoying drinks.

"You don't need to be an expert in wine or art to enjoy them together. You just have to enjoy them," said Craig Ceccanti, CEO of a paint 'n' sip company called Pinot's Palette. Ceccanti first became familiar with the paint 'n' sip concept 11 years ago when he was "dragged along" to a BYOB painting class for a family outing. Ceccanti and his brother brought beer to make the painting process "a bit easier" and enjoyed the experience. Within a year of launching Pinot's Palette, Ceccanti and cofounder Charles Willis found that the franchise was so successful that both of them quit their day jobs.

Some paint 'n' sip venues offer BYOB options; others sell wine, beer and mixed drinks to customers. One constant: Wine is present, and it's the drink of choice by far. "This is a place where women connect," said Cathy Deano, founder of Painting with a Twist, which has more than 250 locations. "It just became the natural order of things to have wine."

One company, Paint Nite, is a licensing business that works with restaurants to offer paint 'n' sip classes with local artists. Founders Sean McGrail and Dan Hermann started the company in 2012, and today Paint Nite holds events in over 3,300 venues worldwide, including Argentina, Canada, South Africa and the U.K. Every venue has a liquor license and, according to the company, 60 percent of all purchased alcohol is wine.

Pinot's Palette targets wine drinkers specifically, hosting more than half of its events in wine bars and wine-specific locations. Of all alcohol sales last year, 80 percent were wine, not including wine-mixed drinks like sangria and mimosas.

Paint 'n' sip company owners believe the growing popularity reflects the increasing number of young, women wine drinkers. They say up to 90 percent of paint 'n' sip participants are women, and at many events, at least half of them are Millennials ages 21 to 35. Multiple marketing research reports have found that this demographic contains many high-frequency wine drinkers, many of them urban, educated professional women.

The "all-are-welcome" attitude of a paint 'n' sip night out offers an outlet that is a fun, no-pressure environment. That's an opportunity for wine producers and importers to introduce their wines to new consumers. At some events, the host restaurant's wine director or a winery brand representative uses the classes to share details about wines, promote different wineries and gauge how the crowd likes a new wine on the menu.

Large volume wines in the \$10 to \$15 range, such as Apothic Red or Cupcake Vineyards, dominate the paint 'n' sip space. Last year, Pinot's Palette partnered with Constellation Brands to place wines from The Dreaming Tree in more than 100 participating venues. Constellation's national account director, Rachel Belavic, says the company saw noticeable sales increases as paint 'n' sip consumers had the chance to taste not just one wine from the label, but the entire portfolio.

Domaine Chandon, Korbel, Gallo and other wineries have partnered with Paint Nite, sponsoring concurrent classes in different states and creating pop-up events aimed at brand exposure and wine education. Pinot's Palette is hoping to cement another partnership later this year. "We love [partnerships]," said Ceccanti. "The U.S. market is just craving an outlet like this." For wineries, there's potential in paint.

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