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HEADLINE: Motivations of High-End Wine Consumers Revealed in New *Wine Market Council* Study



Who Are the High-end Wine Consumers? Photo Credit: Unsplash.com, K. Chance

Dec. 18, 2023 - Napa Valley, California — Who are the U.S. consumers who regularly spend \$20 or more on a bottle of wine; what motivates them to do so, and for which occasions? These were some of the core questions explored in a new [Wine Market Council](#) (WMC) research study just released to WMC members this month, and presented in a webinar.

“High-end wine consumers are a very special segment that only make up about 7% of U.S. adults,” stated WMC research partner, Darcen Esau, Founder and Co-Owner of [Terroir Consulting](#), a wine-focused research and development consultancy group. “And they are extremely important to wineries that specialize in fine and luxury priced wines.”

Indeed, according to a recent statistic from [SipSource](#), 85% of the wine sold in the U.S. market is priced at \$15 or less, with an average 750 ml bottle price of \$12.09 at retail establishments (52 weeks ending 12/5/23). Therefore, consumers who regularly spend \$20 or more for a 750ml bottle of wine at least once a month, are rather a rare breed

The research study was conducted in two phases from July to December of 2023. The first part consisted of a three-day discussion group with 27 high-end wine consumers from across the nation. Findings from this phase were used along with other data to develop a survey, which was ultimately completed by a representative sample of 747 high-end wine consumers across the U.S., from a pool of over 10,000 consumers. Rigorous analysis of responses was used to verify that only 'real' high-end wine consumers were included in the final representative sample.

“In addition to screening questions and various respondent quality detectors, we went through each response to validate the final sample,” reported Christian Miller, WMC Research Director. “One of the methods we used was to ask respondents to enter a wine they typically purchased for every price tier above \$20 that they claimed to buy regularly. We then verified that these brand names matched our price points.”

The results of the study show some surprising changes in demographics, motivations, and purchase occasions of high-end consumers, and provide some potential action items for wineries and retailers to engage more successfully with this special segment of consumers.

“We were surprised at some of the findings in the study, because they show that a new group of consumers is interested in purchasing fine wines, especially those of consistent quality, good complexity, and made in a sustainable manner,” stated Dr. Liz Thach, MW, President of the Wine Market Council.

Demographics Show More Younger & Multicultural Consumers Moving into High-End Wine

Whereas in the past, studies focused on luxury wine consumers showed that the majority are older, with higher incomes, and primarily white-Caucasian, this study highlighted the fact the more younger and multicultural consumers are moving into the category.

Though the demographic profile of high-end consumers in the sample shows more men (62%) than women (37%), which is consistent with other research, surprisingly the sample also showed that 42% are between the ages of 21 to 39. Furthermore, these high-end consumers are willing to spend an average of \$31 per bottle for a weekday dinner at home, and \$65 per bottle for a special occasion.

From a multicultural perspective, 17% of Black Americans, 13% Hispanic and 5% Asian made up the high-end sample. Interestingly, both Black and Hispanic high-end consumers were willing to

spend statistically more on a bottle of wine for special occasions, with an average of \$63 per bottle, compared to non-Hispanic white Americans at \$49 per bottle.

“This shows how wine culture is shifting in America, and how important it is for the wine industry to pay more attention to younger and multi-cultural consumers,” stated Christian Miller. “They trade up more frequently, if in less volume, and the high-end consumers among them are more likely to be increasing their purchases than decreasing.”

Motivations of High-End Wine Consumers

Motivations of high-end consumers were gleaned from the in-depth interviews and validated in the survey. The results show how important wine is in the everyday lives of these consumers.

“Many people reported that the enjoyment of wine transcends specific occasions and becomes part of a lifestyle, a staple, and a necessity,” said Darcen Esau. “It also is a memory maker that helps create personal connections with others, and plays a multifaceted role in their lives to bring happiness and pleasure.”

In addition, high-end wine consumers see wine as a way to relax and enjoy life. It is a ‘comforter and decompressor,’ as well as a way to bond with friends, socialize and to celebrate special occasions. They enjoy learning about wine and exploring the different flavors. These consumers also find wine to be adventurous, because of the different sensory experiences it creates, and they consider it to be a little luxury and indulgence in their lives.

Economic Impact on High-End Wine Consumers

Given that wine sales have declined 4% in volume and 1% in value in the past 52 weeks, according to [NielsenIQ](#), (52 weeks ending 7/23/23) the study also quizzed high-end wine consumers on what they would do if their disposable income was reduced. Surprisingly, 38% said they would drink less wine but continue drinking the same high-end wine they are now. However, the other 46% of the sample said they would continue to drink wine, but just not as many \$20+ bottles. The remaining 15% indicated wine is so integral to their life, it would not impact their wine purchasing.

“I would most likely devote more time to each bottle of wine. I’d probably sip slowly and savor the wine,” said one high-end consumer in the in-depth interviews. Another reported, “Life’s too short to drink lousy wine. This is an indulgence that I build into my budget.”

While economic slow-downs and reduced income are beyond the control of wine marketers, focusing efforts on the specific motivations, influences, and attitudes towards wine of young and multi-cultural consumers has strong potential, as this group transitions through life phases and gains more resources to spend on wine. The research is full of actionable items to better understand this segment and what is driving their interest in high-end wine.

Attributes and Factors That Create High-End Wine Consumers

The study also examined many other topics, such as the key influences to start purchasing high-end wine, the attributes these consumers look for in high-end wines, the amount of wine they currently own, other wine drinking occasions, the impact of spirits, cocktails and craft beer, and other factors.

“It is a quite comprehensive study,” reported Liz Thach, MW. “WMC members will receive the 56-page qualitative study and the 60+ page quantitative study, along with the research webinar recording, with recommended action items to attract more high-end wine consumers to the category.”

About the Wine Market Council and Membership

Wine Market Council (WMC) is a non-profit organization powered by members with an interest in advancing the U.S. wine market and industry. Established in 1996, the mission of WMC is *‘to be the leader in forward-looking market research on U.S. wine consumer buying habits, attitudes and trends.’*

Members of Wine Market Council have access to cutting-edge research on the U.S. wine consumer, along with member webinars, newsletters, access to data files and statistics, and other benefits. Membership starts as low as \$1000 per year for access to data files, depending on the size of your organization. Members include wineries, distributors, growers, importers, regional, national, and international trade associations, and affiliates. For more information on membership and costs, please see <https://winemarketcouncil.com/join/>.