

## **The Wine Market Council and Nielsen present their annual report on the state of wine in the United States.**

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<http://www.winemag.com/Wine-Enthusiast-Magazine/Web-2012/Wines-2011-Report-Card/>

The results are in—the wine industry is looking up. That’s according to the seventh-annual study on wine consumption in the U.S. conducted by the Wine Market Council and Nielsen Marketing in 2011. The optimistic findings were announced on January 31, 2012 at a press conference held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

“Wine remains an enigma, a mystery,” said Xavier Barlier, chair of the Wine Market Council’s Board of Directors. “We have to solve the mystery if we want to expand the consumer base.”

Despite the turbulent economic state and what some claim is a shrinking middle class, the American consumer base does appear to be expanding, as wine drinkers in the U.S. consumed 291 million cases of wine in 2011 (up from 278 million in 2010). This growth was closely tracked as the study followed the drinking habits of the Millennial generation, this year splitting the consumer segment into two parts: younger Millennials (ages 21-25) and older Millennials (ages 26-34).

When compared to their younger counterparts, older Millennials consume wine with greater frequency (several times a week), consumed more glasses of wine per drinking occasion (2.92 glasses on average) and were found to be highly experimental, with statistics showing 89% of older Millennials frequently purchasing wine of an unfamiliar brand. “So much for brand loyalty,” said John Gillespie, president of the Wine Market Council and head of the Bordeaux Wine Information Bureau.

Other fascinating statistics showed that 60% of older Millennials found “fun and contemporary looking” wine labels of great importance when choosing wines to drink at home (compared to just 31% of Baby Boomers) and revealed that older Millennials are the most upscale diners, more likely than any other generation to drink wine while dining out. Unsurprisingly, Millennials and “High End” wine drinkers are the most involved online, visiting wine-related Web sites with frequency and maintaining Facebook and Twitter accounts regularly.

News on beer showed the craft and Mexican import segments grew slightly (though the category was down overall), while Bourbon, Irish whiskey and ready-to-drink spirits categories showed strong growth. As in previous years, vodka remains on top, with flavored vodkas in a stunning array of varieties—particularly in sweet flavors like cake and whipped cream—proving most popular.

American drinkers’ predilection for sweets was evident across the board, with the study showing explosive gains in the Moscato category (up 73%) and an increased consumer interest in “sweet reds.”

For table wines, Argentina and New Zealand were the leaders in import growth. Moscato, Malbec and Pinot Noir were the top three varieties, while interest in Syrah, White Zinfandel and Merlot is on the decline.

So what does all this mean for the American wine consumer? Wine lovers can continue to expect stable wine prices (the study showed that beverage prices were relatively flat in 2011, with the \$9–\$12 category still the most popular) and increased availability (Target and Walgreen’s, for example, are implementing more wines in-store), two factors that will undoubtedly keep wine lovers invested in glass and grape in 2012.