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WINE

‘Come Over October’ counters ‘Sober October’ with wine and friendship

The new marketing campaign is aiming to counter anti-alcohol sentiment and promote wine’s convivial nature.

by Dave McIntyre | September 26, 2024

For the next few weeks, you may hear or see the phrase and other signs of a new international marketing campaign, “Come Over October,” especially where wine is sold. It urges us to visit one another — “come over,” if you will — and share in wine, companionship and conversation.

It comes as wine is plagued by sluggish sales and a rising anti-alcohol sentiment epitomized by “Sober October,” “Dry January” and a shift in public health advice from drinking in moderation to total abstinence.

It also comes during a fractious election season in an era of divisive partisan politics, with many Americans still leery of social interaction following the trauma of the pandemic. “Come Over October” wants us to rediscover how wine has fostered social, cultural and religious connections among people for 8,000 years.

“The most important part of Come Over October is the ‘come over,’” said Karen MacNeil, the Napa Valley-based wine writer and author of “The Wine Bible” (Workman, 2022), who conceived the campaign. She spoke to me by phone from South Africa, where she was visiting wineries. “Tonight I dined with five people who just two hours ago were complete strangers,” she said. “At the end of the evening, we all hugged, and we are now friends. That idea sounds so simple, even mushy, but I think every wine lover has had that experience. After sharing a meal, some wine, some conversation, you are friends.”

MacNeil conceived the campaign earlier this year and organized it with Kimberly Noelle Charles and Gino Colangelo, two prominent wine marketers. The wine community responded enthusiastically. Sponsors include Total Wine & More, Jackson Family Wines, individual wineries and winery associations from California, Oregon, Champagne, Sicily and more, as well as several wine publications.

“We are living in trying times, and we all know that good company, good conversation, laughter, and conviviality contribute to an enhanced lifestyle,” MacNeil states in a news release about the campaign. “We want to encourage people to put down their devices and share in each other’s company. Historically and socially, wine has often played a role in facilitating conversation, nurturing new friendships, and deepening old ones.”



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Come Over October is a cheerful counter to Sober October, one of two months (along with Dry January) when many people abstain from beverage alcohol for a few weeks. These campaigns, in my opinion, have a performative nature to them and blur or even erase the distinction between moderate drinking and problem-drinking.

Prohibition is also on the rise. In January 2023, the World Health Organization changed its guidance to “no level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health,” a major shift from the advice we’ve heard for years, to “drink in moderation.” The U.S. government is considering adopting this harsher stance in its dietary guidelines, and this anti-alcohol viewpoint has already entered the discourse in media coverage as well as in regular comments here on my wine columns.

In our conversation, MacNeil was reluctant to cast Come Over October as an explicit counter to this anti-alcohol wave, though she did draw a distinction between wine’s traditional role and the extreme specter of all alcohol being harmful.

“This is not Come and Party October, or Binge January,” she said. “It’s come over and share some wine. We don’t even say a bottle of wine; we say share some wine to honor its historical and cultural role in bringing people together.

“This isn’t a conversation about alcohol abuse,” she said. “It’s simply a recognition of something terribly important: We are social creatures who like to be in one another’s company, and wine plays a positive role in bringing us together.”

With the enthusiastic response so far from the wine community, MacNeil said that she, Charles and Colangelo plan to make Come Over October an annual campaign, and are considering a corresponding event for springtime.

So in the coming weeks, think of a friend you haven’t seen in a while, a neighbor you’ve always wanted to get to know better, or a colleague you butted heads with in a meeting recently and invite them over. Offer them a glass and let the wine work its magic, weaving connections that have transcended culture and time for millennia.