

Wine Darwinism

GONZÁLEZ BYASS USA CEO ANDREW SINCLAIR ON THE ROLE OF LEGACY IMPORTS IN TODAY'S MARKET

by Randy Caparoso

Andrew Sinclair, the CEO of González Byass USA, recently took a few minutes to chat about the current global wine crisis impacting all related industries, from distribution to hospitality. Sinclair speaks for an import portfolio of astounding breadth: no fewer than 40 wine labels produced in Argentina, Austria, Chile, France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain (plus 11 luxury spirit brands)—all in a market still dominated by domestic wines, which represent about 65% of sales in the U.S. Meanwhile, the largest demographic cohort, baby boomers, is steadily shrinking as the youngest adults, Generation Z, are coming to an agonizingly slow appreciation of wine—and some are even practicing abstinence.



Sinclair points to Austria's Domäne Wachau and France's Jean-Luc Colombo as the kind of "authentic" producers that millennials and Gen Z gravitate toward.

Resilience, thy name is González Byass USA. According to Sinclair, these circumstances have actually created numerous opportunities for a company led by a product introduced in 1835: That is the singular, briny, dry-as-a-bone Sherry known as Tío Pepe. "At the end of this fiscal year [August 2025], our sales are showing a 50% growth in shipments," he stated. "How can that be? I think legacy brands find their places in challenging markets precisely because of where they stand in terms of the biggest concerns of today's youngest demographics, millennials and Gen Z. Right now, it's all about sustainability and authenticity. González Byass and,

say, France's Jean-Luc Colombo and Austria's Domäne Wachau are authenticity personified. When we tell their stories, it clicks with younger consumers, perhaps more than it did than with previous generations. . . . Gen Z [in particular] is . . . about transparency and honesty. Many of our wines fall right into that. For instance, in Spain, wines by Bodegas Beronia [from Rioja and Rueda] and Dominio Fournier [from Ribera del Duero] are associated with long tradition. They practice what they preach, especially in terms of sustainable and organic viticulture. When you sip a Viura, Verdejo, or rosé from Spain, you feel like you are sitting in a café in San Sebastián. That's authenticity, not to mention affordability. There is also the



lightness of alcohol valued by younger consumers, who are concerned about [maintaining a] moderate, or healthy, lifestyle."

Noting González Byass USA's "long, fruitful" relationship with Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, Sinclair added, "That gets us in the door, but we have also been working with our partners on communicating the gastronomic roles of our wines, starting with Tío Pepe, our most iconic brand. It is an emotional part of our company, setting us apart from everyone else. It is also one of the driest and most versatile wines in the world, as wonderful with fish and chips dipped in vinegar as with



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the spiciest, umami-laced foods such as Chinese dumplings or pickled Korean vegetables—the foods that younger consumers actually eat."

Calling sommeliers "our allies," he explained, "We work with them on seizing opportunities to optimize the taste of a [Pazos de Lusco] Albariño or [Veramonte or Santa Carolina] Sauvignon Blanc by serving the wines in frozen glasses, the same way we recommend pouring Fino or Manzanilla. . . . [There's] nothing technical or complicated about [this]; the only thing you are teaching is how to enhance [guests'] experience."

While price is top of mind for today's consumers, Sinclair made a distinction between affordability and value, singling out Jean-Luc Colombo Cornas as an example: "It falls in a higher, more aspirational price bracket yet still represents value in terms of what you get—an authentic, phenomenal, one-of-a-kind [expression]."

Sinclair views the market in terms of what he calls "wine Darwinism." It's survival of the fittest, the fittest being the wines with the longest track records. When you have brands that are contemporary in flavor profiles but also have an established history, it is that much easier to communicate authenticity. . . . The current global market is in huge oversupply, going through a painful period of adjustment. But the opportunities are there for the legacy brands. I think our wines are proving that." **TE**