

Wine in the wake of corona

By [Kristen Duff](#) and [Gosia Young](#)

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Let's be honest, the past year hasn't been a bed of roses. From Covid-19 to an economic downturn, so much of our energy was spent just getting through each day. For many of us in the wine industry, this became a lot harder when a ban on alcohol sales was implemented in late March 2020. Join us as we take a moment to reflect on what was and the lessons we can take into the new year.

The virtual shopper

With most of the population stuck indoors for much of 2020, it's no surprise that e-commerce boomed. Many sceptical South Africans tried online shopping for the first time and were pleasantly surprised by its efficiency and convenience. While existing online wine and liquor stores saw significant growth, wineries, typically viewed as traditional and at times even primitive in their sales approach, were forced to upgrade their web and direct-to-consumer channels as a matter of urgency. With on-trade retail (bars and restaurants) still compromised as we go into 2021, further growth is forecast in the digital realm.

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Stockpiling

Following multiple months’ long alcohol bans, many who would normally pop a bottle or two into their shopping trolley on the way home from work now make sure their wine racks are stocked with their favourites at all times - *just in case*. It remains to be seen whether this trend endures but, for now, the memory of *running out* is still rather fresh. We anticipate bulk buying and stockpiling (some may even call it *cellaring*) to continue as a trend for some time.



SA wine in the time of coronavirus: A case of adapt or die

Kristen Duff and Gosia Young 22 Apr 2020



The conscious wine consumer

It seems millennials, who are seeking options that are aligned with their health and environmental philosophies, are behind the rapid growth in organic, sustainable and vegan-suitable wines.

“ This trend has given rise to a diverse range of niche wines and subcategories emerging to cater to this newmarket. This includes everything from lowalcohol and de-alcoholised wines, to natural, low-sulphite and organic wines. ”

The growth in this category is great news for local winemakers, as it represents a significant opportunity to segue out from the traditional wine market into a blue ocean. Of course, the key to success is to understand how to tap into the millennial segment, who have reduced their consumption and are opting to drink less and drink better.



Kristen Duff, Gosia Young

Sipping virtually

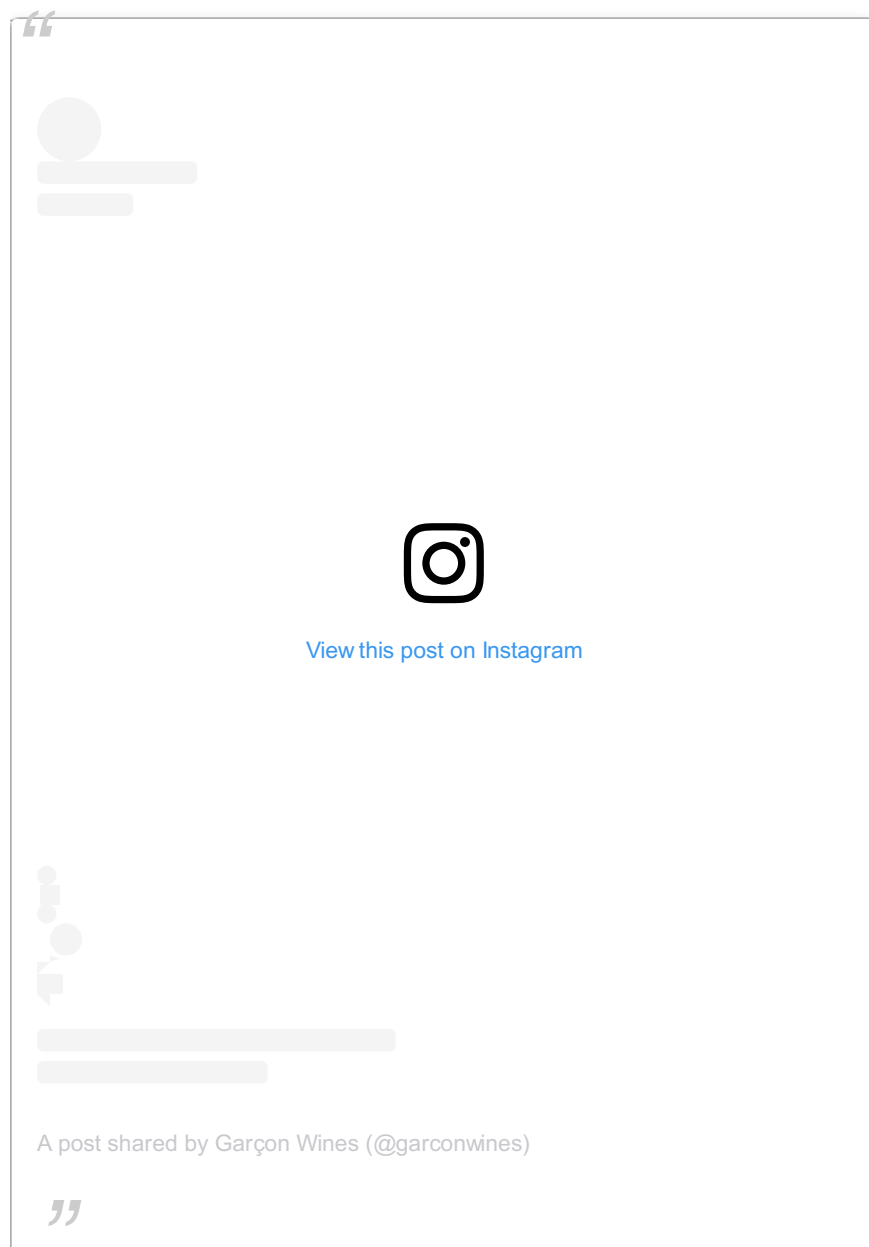
First, there was the Zoom call. Then came the Zoom tasting. With wineries like Creation in the Hemel-en-Aarde launching bespoke tasting 'kits' composed of miniature bottles of their premium wines, it suddenly became possible to *taste with the winemaker* from anywhere in the country and, in fact, the world. Online wine events, webinars and tastings show no sign of slowing down, and we have a hunch this trend will continue well past the time of coronavirus.

Alternative packaging

From flat-pack plastic bottles to wine in a can and box winemaking a big comeback, 2020 was a highlight for creative wine packaging trends. Well before quarantine changed our collective lives, the wine industry acknowledged the need to offer exciting and convenient wine packaging concepts for millennial consumers, who tend to value single servings and informative nutritional labels in sustainable packaging.

“ While historically, wine marketers felt heavy bottles subconsciously suggested the value of the wine to the consumer, there is a paradigm shift towards lighter weight, more environmentally-friendly bottles. ”

Recently, Accolade Wines, in collaboration with Garçon Wines, launched Hardy's Wine in recycled PET flat-pack bottles, to minimise production and distribution costs. Meanwhile, single-serve cans are skyrocketing in popularity, with brands like Spier, Robertson and Uncanny jumping on the veritable bandwagon.



A huge plus? South African wine consumers seem to be thinking more and more out of the box, with premium BiB (Bag-

in-Box) released by brands such as Fairview, Shine Club Wine and Ben Wren Wine Co. offering quality BiB wine sourced from respected South African wine cellars.

Ultimately, despite the difficulties and setbacks that Covid-19 has caused for so many, 2020 served as another reminder that the wine industry is much like the beloved grapevine – it's resilient, knows how to weather a storm and rich with flavour.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristen Duff and Gosia Young are the founders of Glou Glou ('glug glug' in French), an online platform that talks wine for real human beings. Following their shared studies in media and wine business, Gosia runs her own wine marketing consultancy called Gosh! ([goshco.co.za]), while Kristen is Head of Communications at PUBLIK and CyberCellar. Kristen was recently awarded the title of Veritas Young Wine Writer 2020, while Gosia previously held the same title for 2017.

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