



One Thing That's Killing the Wine Industry

By Karen MacNeil

*Karen, author of *The Wine Bible*, is one of the founders of Come Together—A Community for Wine and the Come Over October movement. In this article, she examines how the shift toward expensive, prestige-driven wine-by-the-glass programs has sidelined humble, affordable wines and made many consumers hesitant to order wine at all, weakening wine's role as an everyday pleasure.*

When Coravin entered the wine universe in 2013, the vinous planets realigned. Almost overnight you could order a glass of wine that cost \$15, \$25 or more, and know that the wine would be in perfect condition.

It seemed like a huge boon for consumers and for the wine industry.

But was it? Or did the wine industry shoot itself in the foot?

For a minute, it's worth remembering what preceded high priced wine-by-the-glass. In short: simple inexpensive whites and simple cheap reds.

Depending on the restaurant, these "house wines" could be decently tasty quaffs (as you might get in a good café in Europe), or they could be innocuously "plain Jane." But either way, the wine was effortlessly serviceable.

Sometimes, you had no idea who the producer was. You just ordered the house wine, and then relaxed into the generic bliss of not needing to know the region, the grapes, the barrel aging regimen, the vintage, or anything else. House wines were easy; comforting in a way. And because they didn't cost a lot, they were risk free. You didn't hesitate before ordering them.

All of that is now gone. Pricey wines-by-the-glass are ubiquitous and big business.

Such wines have theoretically helped the wine business by allowing consumers to taste exalted wines they might otherwise never have tasted.

But that idea has come with a lot of collateral damage. Because the not-so-subtle message behind expensive wines-by-the-glass is that anything less than expensive is just too embarrassing to order.

Better to get a cocktail. (Cocktails don't have an image problem).

Everywhere I go these days, people talk about how expensive wine has become. And, as nearly every US wine list attests, many wines have indeed become stratospherically expensive. But that's only one side of the problematic coin.

The other side is that we've turned our backs on humble wines that are simply good. These were the inexpensive every night wines that carried whole cultures forward. They carried no pretense of greatness. They just wanted a place in front of you at the bar or on the dinner table.

Unfortunately these days, the signal that's sent is: good isn't good enough. Only great wines count. And they are stratospherically priced.

Are we surprised then that large segments of the wine drinking public now hesitate before ordering wine?

In so many situations, good honest affordable wine would hit the nail perfectly on the head. If only wineries would have the courage to make them, and restaurants have the courage to offer them.