



Is Wine in the Alcohol Business?

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 reframes the current debate by emphasizing that wine is not simply an alcohol product, but a cultural and social force rooted in food, place, and human connection—one that producers are uniquely positioned to defend through storytelling rather than science.*

Recently, a reporter asked me if I thought the wine industry was doing enough to tackle the negative messaging about alcohol?

And therein lies the problem: namely, that the current discussion about wine is being framed around *alcohol*. To me, wine is way more than alcohol. In fact, if all you wanted was some alcohol, there are cheaper ways to get it than buying a Napa Valley Cabernet, or a French Sancerre, or a Chianti Classico. Wine is threaded into a rich tapestry of culture, food, art, religion, and nature. For most wine producers, wine is so much more than alcohol. And I bet that's true for consumers too.

Frankly, my heart goes out to wine producers, a majority of whom are small businesses. They do what they do best. They make their wines and tell their stories, hopefully compellingly. Most wine producers are not in a position to give medical advice or evaluate scientific research on alcohol. And it's frustrating that they are being asked to.

But wine producers *can* tell the story of wine's social value and its capacity to foster connection between us all. That's what we are doing with the campaign I co-founded, *Come Over October*. We're telling wine's 8,000-year story as a force for social good; 8,000 years of connecting people in friendship. I think wineries feel this deeply.

I believe most wine drinkers do too. At a time when we are digitized to distraction, when we can barely get out of bed without cell phone in hand, there is something grounding about real human connection, about opening a bottle of wine at 6pm and sharing it with someone you care about.

There's authenticity in that. There's generosity in that. There's hope in that.