

ROUNDTABLE & TASTING
In partnership with Millésime BIO

LOWER-ALCOHOL WINES – A FRESH APPROACH

Ahead of its forthcoming organic showcase fair, Millésime BIO was joined by *Harpers* to showcase organically made low & no and lower-alcohol wines

This tasting and discussion focused on the growing lower-alcohol sector in the UK drinks industry, looking at the opportunities for retailers and buyers to tap into the ever-increasing call for such options. And, while the trend to more modest consumption is seen across all age groups, this becomes particularly pertinent with sought-after younger consumers, who also align with sustainability values such as organic production.

Thus, we began the event with a tasting of innovative naturally lower and low & no-alcohol wine-based drinks from a range of organic producers, all sourced from exhibitors of the upcoming Millésime BIO 2027 wine fair. As a snapshot of what is on offer, this provided a great window into these lower-alcohol categories and the quality now to be found.

While tasting, our panel considered not only the flavour profiles, but also the packaging and how this communicated to the target audience. Scoring as we went along, this then allowed us to select the 20 wines you see overpage, with some of our collective standouts also flagged. What is certain is that the best of the low & no wines are now delivering real character, while the naturally lower-alcohol wines – with their often fresh and eminently drinkable styles – are right on trend.

Perhaps a final thing to mention is how pleasant it was to leave a tasting room feeling as fresh and lively as when we pitched up. Here, then, are some highlights from the comments and discussion on the day – a taster, if you will, of a fascinating and fast-expanding category.

> "What's available is certainly getting better, there are better quality expressions"
> **Andy Cole, Vinotopia**



DANIELE ARCANGELI, EKSTEDT AT THE YARD

"We have lots of requests about low-alcohol and non-alcoholic pairings, for instance, in the restaurant. I think my low-alcohol flight is my best flight. For us, it's a great opportunity. So I think we have to work on it to expand the range available. I'm very open minded about it.

My only concern is price, because if I charge in the restaurant with a normal mark-up, these would start coming in around £50 a bottle and will people pay that for a non-alcoholic wine? I think these wines will sell well by the glass.

"With the sparkling wines, we sell English sparkling wine by the glass, and I think these sparkling alternatives should sit just below that, somewhere between £10 and £12. We have to find something enjoyable, good value and high quality, something that the guests will appreciate. The label has to look good too. But I've found quite a few wines here that are very interesting.

"Many sommeliers don't want to deal with this kind of stuff. They prefer to tell you that they're selling wines. But there is a great opportunity with those people who are not drinking at all, or those who are cutting down their alcohol."



NEIL PALMER, VINTAGE ROOTS

"We're being swamped with a lot of products at the moment and the demand hasn't caught up. There's so much dross in this low & no market out there, but there are some real gems as well. Some of the really good quality stuff is very expensive, but for an entry to the category that can work well. There's a lot of innovation now, new things coming through. We've tried the wines here and there are some great products. And with younger generations, many are not drinking at all.

"There is the challenge that it is significantly different to taste something that is zero to something that's 11.5%, and then you start thinking 'what's my benchmark?'. With a zero, are you judging it against a fruit juice, or are you judging against an 11.5% wine? And with 11.5%, are you judging it against something that's zero, because obviously it'll have far more structure, or the best in the category of that [given style of] wine? I was also hoping for more 7% wines, for comparison."

VENUE

Harpers would like to thank the team at the WSET school in London's Bermondsey Street for use of their Distillers 2 room.

wsetglobal.com/wset-school-london

TASTING PANEL

- **Andy Cole**, MD, Vinotopia
- **Daniele Arcangeli**, head sommelier, Ekstedt at the Yard
- **Neil Palmer**, founder, Vintage Roots
- **Nella Alberti**, Italy buyer, Enotria
- **Julie Buckley**, COO, Winetraders UK
- **Richard Harding**, school principal, WSET
- **Andrew Catchpole**, moderator and editor, *Harpers Wine & Spirit*



ANDY COLE, VINOTOPIA

"I think it's not just for health now, it's also about people being interested in trying lower-alcohol wines. What's available is certainly getting better, there are better quality expressions. I personally find the whites are better than the reds – there's a bit more depth, a bit more structure going on with the whites. The reds are still catching up.

"At least you know that if a producer has been prepared to put an organic certification on the bottle, then hopefully they put enough care and attention into the wine as well. There are some very well-priced organic wines here. And I think more and more, organic is something that people expect."



JULIE BUCKLEY, WINETRADERS UK

"I'm really encouraged by what we've tasted today because I do think that [wine is] now catching up with the consumer and what their expectations are based on other categories. For me, one of the most interesting points is whether you're trying to market your product directly to somebody who's moderating, or somebody who's drinking a different product entirely, because I don't think you can necessarily market it to them in the same way. One of the more successful areas for zero alcohol is actually the prosecco alternatives, in that they taste as close to the original as is possible, and because it's created in large quantities therefore costs are lower.

"The other interesting element is for buyers specifically. If I think about the grocery sector, there's a perception that if there's no duty or low duty, the product will be cheaper than a full-price equivalent. And it isn't – depending on the level of intervention that needs to have happened. There's the value perception for the buyers and I think there's such a big educational piece to do there, because actually there's a lot of intervention at [the low & no level], rather than making wine in a

more conventional way. And that can be a barrier to overcome, to educate the buyer as to why that product may not be cheaper."



↘ NELLA ALBERTI, ENOTRIA

"This shift to lower alcohol, to not getting drunk, to no alcohol, it's not just happening in the UK, it's all over Europe, and all over the world. And younger people, they just like the experience of tasting different things, and they don't want to be drunk.

"With the lower-alcohol wines, though, I'd like to play devil's advocate. When people go for lower alcohol, what is actually happening, what is happening with the duty and the price? What are people genuinely asking for? Do they want lower-alcohol wine, or are they looking for a lower price? Because there is a difference between 11% and 13%, not necessarily in quality, but in price."



↘ RICHARD HARDING, WSET

"We are seeing a lot of demand from people wanting to learn about low & no. We currently do it in the form of events, webinars and things like that. I think about six years ago we did our first event, and we sold over 100 tickets. We were like, 'Oh, this is one of our bestselling events ever, and it's a big world of wine', so it shows that it is out there to be learned about. I think the challenge is in teaching people about it, you can see here the variety tasted, just tasting one by one, it's still developing so much and that's why we're looking at more events, webinars, non-qualification stuff at the moment, because [the category] just keeps changing so much."

MILLÉSIME BIO 2027: GET YOUR TICKETS TO THE WORLD'S TOP ORGANIC WINE FAIR

↘ WHERE: MONTPELLIER EXHIBITION CENTRE
↘ WHEN: 25-27 JANUARY

The 34th edition of Millésime BIO will bring together exhibitors from all French and international wine-growing regions, as well as a wide range of professional buyers. Join masterclasses to understand, question, discuss and reflect on the organic industry (wines, beers, ciders, spirits) across four dedicated 100% organic areas: Beer & Bio, Cider & Bio, Spirit & Bio, No Low & Bio.

Millésime BIO registration

"When people go for lower alcohol, what is actually happening, what is happening with the duty and the price? What are people genuinely asking for?"
Nella Alberti, Enotria

WINES TASTED

1. LE RENDEZ-VOUS NV, FAMILLE FABRE, FRANCE (0.5%)
Fresh, lemony, with a hint of melon and dry stone fruits on its gently sparkling palate, this was a balanced and attractive wine.

2. HERISSON MALIN CHARDONNAY BULLES 0% NV, JACQUES FRELIN VIGNOBLES, FRANCE (0%)
BEST NO-ALCOHOL WINE
With its jolly hedgehog label this was a hit, offering up an aromatic nose of honeysuckle and roasted apples, with good fruit on a well-balanced palate.

3. L'IMPROMPTU NV, MAS DE CADENET, FRANCE (7%)
Notably rounded on the nose and palate after the no-alcohol styles, this had a citrussy streak throughout, being nicely textured and finishing long.

4. BUGEY CERDON MÉTHODE ANCESTRALE NV, RENARDAT-FACHE, BUGEY, FRANCE (7.5%)
Enticing cherry and soft red berry fruits marked this attractive and supple Méthode Ancestrale, with the Gamay base clearly shining through.

5. BIZZ NV, BARGEMONE, FRANCE (11.5%)
Judges loved the lippy label on this sparkling Grenache, also finding an attractive strawberry and raspberry-ish character inside, with hints of citrus lifting the refreshing finish.

6. ZESTE NV, VIGNOBLES LACOSTE, SUD-OUEST FRANCE (0%)
BEST ALTERNATIVE TO WINE
A zesty label announcing a zesty beverage, this was a real hit with the tasters, oozing with real lemony character, awakening the palate with a pleasing zing.

7. PURO PET NAT BIANCO 2025, FATTORIA LAVACCHIO, TOSCANA, ITALY (11%)
BEST PET NAT
From the clarity of its paired back label to the purity of the Trebbiano inside, this ran the gamut from citrus to apples and pears, with hints of candied fruits through to its very dry finish.

8. LA PART DU COLIBRI FOLLE BLANCHE 2025, CLARISSE ET EMMANUELLE CAILLE, FRANCE (9.5%)
Citrus, apples and stone fruit all intermingled on this angular and quite complex expression of the variety, with its acidity and structure calling out for seafood.



9. FOLLE BLANCHE LIEUBEAU NV, FAMILLE LIEUBEAU, VAL DE LOIRE, FRANCE (10.5%)
This had an expressive nose, being slightly zesty before easing into a stone fruits-lined palate, with quality high on the well-balanced and textural wine.

10. ROC & ROLLE 2025, LES VINS ALEXANDER KROSSA, VALLÉE DU RHÔNE, FRANCE (11%)
From the jaunty name to the Rolle inside, this wine delighted, mixing up citrus, apple and ripe melon notes with floral hints, being nicely balanced and finishing dry.

11. MARIE LOU 2025, FONCALIEU, LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON, FRANCE (10%)
Petals and light citrus peel notes run through this Colombard, with fleshier stone fruits character rounding out the palate, all lifted by a lively streak of acidity.

12. TU ES POUR MOI UNIQUE AU MONDE, MACCABEU 2024, ARTISANS PARTISANS, FRANCE (11.5%)
Floral, with some subtle hints of herbs, the Macabao behind the name delivered melon and stone fruit characteristics, with good body and length.

13. SAVOIE-CHIGNIN 2025, QUENARD, SAVOIE, FRANCE (11%)
Bright and golden in hue, this rarer Jacquere Blanc wine had nice acidity, some minerality and just a touch of richness through its balanced, long palate.

14. BLANC DE NOIR 2025, DOMAINE DE L'ACCENT, FRANCE (11.5%)
BEST NATURALLY LOWER-ALCOHOL WHITE
The crisp black and white label hinted at what was to come, with this white Mourvedre delivering some expected oomph, but in a sophisticated and very balanced way, suggesting a very food-compatible wine.

15. CULOTTÉE 2025, GUY ET PEYRE, FRANCE (11%)
Fresh and slightly herby on the nose, this Cinsault mixed up red and blue fruits with a creamy texture, lifted by a well-balanced lick of tannins and acidity.

16. LAZULI 2025, LE PECH D'ANDRÉ, LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON, FRANCE (11.5%)
With some satisfying richness on both nose and palate, this Cinsault offered a medley of brambly fruit, hints of spice and just enough tannic grip to meet quite punchily flavoured food.

17. LE ROI CINSAULT 2024, CALMEL & JOSEPH, FRANCE (11.5%)
At once both generous but angular in structure, this brought together notes of herbs, red and dark fruits, plus a hint of spice on a fully fleshed-out, yet lower-alcohol wine.

18. LE CHOUCHOU 2023, GÉRARD BERTRAND, FRANCE (11%)
A blend of hearty southern stalwart varieties, this was a bright and bouncy number, its juicy palate delivering much flavour, with just enough acidity and structure to bring it home.

19. LE TEMPS DES FLEURS 2025, FAMILLE ARBEAU, SUD-OUEST FRANCE (11.5%)
BEST NATURALLY LOWER-ALCOHOL RED
Flagged by the soothing flowers on its label, this bright and juicy Negrette-Syrah blend boasted attractive red fruits, gentle spice and a lingering, mellow, well-balanced finish.

20. FRANC NV, DOMAINE FREDERIC MABILEAU, FRANCE (11%)
The Franc in question here is Cabernet, and the soft red fruits and well-balanced, lighter body of the wine suggested a perfect style for fridge door chilling on a warm day.