

Food

# Undeterred by social distancing, wine lovers around the world embrace virtual happy hours with friends and family

By  
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Wine is a social drink. It demands to be shared. In religion, we drink it to commune with God. In poetry, wine is a vehicle for romance, a ticket to adventure with a special someone. Every wine lover, upon discovering a true gem, wants to share it, because every wine tastes better when paired with conversation. Wine is packaged in a format — the 750-milliliter bottle — too big for one person. It's meant for social intimacy, not social distancing. Certainly not self-isolation.

Wine lovers around the world are reacting to the current turmoil brought on by the [coronavirus](#), and the resulting uncertainty, with characteristic bonhomie — let's drink, even if we have to sit six feet apart, or take our happy hours online. We'll adapt, but we won't surrender.

Wine is not an antidote to the coronavirus. But it may be a counterweight to the anti-social aspects of this pandemic, imperatives causing us to veer to the other side of the street or the supermarket aisle or the impulses driving some of us to run away, yell invectives at anyone who comes near or even buy guns in anticipation of a post-apocalypse dystopia. Flattening the curve does not mean tearing us asunder.

Jane and Phil Curtin, of Silver Spring, Md., posted a photo on Facebook of friends sitting in a socially distanced circle, enjoying a drink in “the new way to do happy hour.” “It wasn't defiance, we just wanted to connect with people,” Jane said. “Three of our friends were biologists, so we learned a lot.” She said her yoga classes were already online, and her next weekend happy hour probably would be, too.

Social media platforms Facebook Live, Zoom, FaceTime and others have temporarily replaced bars, restaurants and living rooms as our gathering places for social interaction. Wine lovers and wineries are quickly pivoting to conversations and wine tastings in these online forums.

Frank Morgan, a wine blogger in Virginia who has long done interactive chat tastings with Virginia wineries, quickly adopted his format to Facebook Live with nightly online interviews with local winemakers. He also called for Saturday to be [Open That Virginia Bottle Night](#), which quickly became an East Coast event on social media. Why not support local wineries when their business is suffering, and why hold on to special bottles if the world as we know it may be about to end?

Wine writer Karen MacNeil, author of "[The Wine Bible](#)," launched a weekly online wine tasting each Friday on her Instagram account, [@karenmacneilco](#), with the hashtag #TasteWithKaren, featuring a wine she selects each week.

Wineries have responded to the pandemic, too. Old Westminster Winery, in Maryland, lobbied the state for permission to deliver wines directly to customers as an emergency means to boost sales. But they didn't stop there: The winery is encouraging customers to donate canned foods and other dry goods that the winery can then distribute to food banks and other organizations in need.

Napa Valley's St. Supéry Winery offered online classes with ampelographer Lucie Morton, to learn about merlot and how it grows in California, while experiencing how it tastes in the glass. And the father-son team of John and Rory Williams at Frog's Leap Winery announced several interactive wine tastings each Saturday, enough time for customers to order the two wines featured each week.

Gary Farrell winery in Sonoma County offered its club members a virtual tour of the Russian River Valley, through a tasting of pinot noir made by winemaker Theresa Heredia from vineyards throughout the appellation. Tastings were held over Tock, the winery's online reservations platform, with members from around the country interacting with the winery's sommeliers leading the tasting.

These are just a few of the wineries scrambling to use online media to connect with customers at a time when we are not allowed to connect in person. For smaller companies, these makeshift measures may help them survive the pandemic's body blow.

"We must support each other, our industry, and communities as much as possible while mitigating the spread of this virus," says John Grimsley, co-owner of Le Storie Wines, an importer based in Richmond. The company has joined with wineries it represents to schedule virtual tastings, dinners and classes in April for customers who reserve and take delivery of wines beforehand.

This pandemic may change the way we socialize, today and into the future, but it won't stop us from sharing.

**Postscript:** Michael Broadbent died March 17, at 92. He had been in declining health for many months.

As head of wine auctions for Christie's in the mid-1960s, Broadbent helped establish London as the center of the modern fine-wine market. He was also a prolific writer, part of the great wave of British wine writers that included Hugh Johnson, Jancis Robinson, Oz Clarke and others. His books, written with flair and a meticulous eye for detail, influenced many a winemaker, sommelier and wine enthusiast — and, of course, other wine writers. His seminal work, "[Wine Tasting](#)," was republished last year as the first entry in the Académie du Vin library. Wine lovers around the world are raising their glasses in tribute to an icon who personified the good life — the social life — that wine represents.