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Eat Drink Cook: Bringing people together with 'Share & Pair Sundays'

Dan Dawson

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Guests enjoy food and wine during a Share & Pair Sundays event held in Napa Valley.

Courtesy photo

Two months ago I attended a press conference for “Share & Pair Sundays,” a campaign to “celebrate wine’s natural connection to food” and to promote wine’s ability to bring people together to sip, share and socialize. It is an off-shoot of “Come Over October,” a campaign with similar goals that proved popular and successful last fall.

My reaction was this: “Share good wine and pair with good food? Heck yeah, I’m in!” (Important to note that the campaign doesn’t judge nor determine what wine or food is “good.” Good is what makes you happy!) And so was born my event, “Share & Pair Sunday – Bring A Bottle of Cabernet Franc.” It’s this Sunday, April 13 from 2 to 5 p.m.

at Outer Space Wines in downtown Napa. There will be Mexican food, celebrating culinary diversity if food and wine. You are invited, and tell a friend. Details are at the end of my column.



Dan Dawson

The creators of Share & Pair Sundays are three wine communications heavyweights: Gino Colangelo, Kimberly Charles and Napa's own, Karen MacNeil. While wine sales will benefit from the campaign, they are not the reason the three took on this mostly pro-bono project.

What can we do to advocate for wine?

Two summers ago Colangelo, founder of wine communications agency Colangelo & Partners, noticed a rise in anti-alcohol rhetoric with a decidedly vitriolic tone.

“It wasn’t random. It seemed somehow planned, consistent and insidious,” he recalled. “So I got together with my agency, brainstormed about ‘what can we do to advocate for wine,’ and we did some research. We found out, (supported by the wine market research group Wine Opinions) that 60+% of 21-39 year olds said A) they felt that risk to their health started at one glass a day, and B) they would consider participating in Dry January and Sober October....very concerning information for people in the wine business.”

MacNeil, renowned speaker, wine consultant and author of *The Wine Bible*, is noticing the same anti-alcohol messaging and is particularly alarmed by the morality attacks.

“Drinking wine should be an individual decision, but the forces now mounted against wine are insidiously presenting their argument as a moral issue,” MacNeil observes. “They imply that anyone drinking an alcoholic beverage is doing damage to the society as a whole.”

An example she shared is The World Health Organization’s “Reporting About Alcohol: A Guide for Journalists” published in 2023. An anti-alcohol manifesto, the guide minces no words and makes no distinction between alcohol types. The first sentence reads “No amount of alcohol is safe to drink.” MacNeil points out the guide’s list of alcohol-related social harms that include violence, vandalism, child maltreatment and all sorts of personal problems. “The forces against wine are cleverly switching their thrust from health to morality. The whole tenor of wine drinking in the U.S. has changed a lot. That’s why the work that we’re doing is so pressing right now. We feel so strongly about speaking out about wine having social value.”

A simple, social, positive campaign

About this time last year the three founders-to-be got together to share their concerns and how they could use their considerable voices to advocate for wine. From there discussions came MacNeil’s idea, *Come Over October*. The mission, “to encourage people to invite family and friends, new and old, to come together during the month of October to share some wine and friendship.” Colangelo recalled his reaction: “Very

simple, very consumer-focused, very social, very positive,” he said while making it clear there is no disparagement of other alcoholic beverages, and respect for one’s choice to not drink is essential: the proverbial you do you. “We all agreed it was a terrific idea, verified the validity of Come Over October, and launched the campaign.” The campaign was indeed successful, boosting sales, foot traffic and wine club sign-ups for participating wineries and retailers. Benchmark Wine Group of Napa generated \$11,000 over four campaigns, and Jackson Family Wines’ report notes \$78,000 in sales, 65 wine club sign-ups, 1,753 web site visits and more. Over 125 wineries, trade groups and retailers, big and small, participated and saw results. “After the success of Come Over October all our supporters said ‘this was great, do it again, make it an annual event, and don’t wait until October,’” MacNeil said. Quickly and nimbly, Share & Pair Sundays was created.

Longterm measures of success

While an uptick in sales and engagement is positive, there are greater measures of success according to the founders. Campaigns designed to uplift an industry are by nature a marathon not a sprint. It’s beyond a marathon even, as changing a feeling and a conversation has no finish line. To this non-end, the campaign carries a positive message of community, gathering and culture. “To me the beauty of wine is the people who make it, the communities behind it, how social wine people are. It’s emotion in a way, but it’s grounded in social interaction and history,” Colangelo said. “This is a multi-year effort to change the narrative about wine. This is not something that can be accomplished in one year or two.”

Speaking to less quantifiable measures of success, MacNeil harkens back to her journalism days, before information was all access, all the time. Back then, there was “refrigerator success,” when a meaningful article would be snipped out and taped to the fridge. When she saw her piece on display, she knew it had made a difference. Today the tape-ups are social media likes and shares. These are important too, but MacNeil most enjoys the awareness she sees when she goes out.

"I love going into restaurants and wineries and see they have somehow learned about Come Over October and Share & Pair Sundays and don't know of my connection," she said. "When a grassroots campaign is really grass-rootsy, it starts to take on a momentum all its own. The idea on its own has value and permeates the culture...that is wonderful and exciting!"

Beyond whoop-dee-doo events like the ones included with this column, MacNeil stresses how a Share & Pair Sunday (and Come Over October this fall) can be enjoyed at home, with a friend, a visit, maybe a game on TV, something simple to eat and a glass of wine. It just takes two to gather, right?

IN THE KNOW

Share & Pair Sunday events in the area

The Share & Pair Sundays campaign runs for 10 successive Sundays, ending May 25: this Sunday, April 13 marks Share & Pair Day #4. You can find upcoming Sunday wine events in the area on this Local Wine Events calendar. Two Napa Valley events that stand out are:

Share & Pair: Bring (and share) A Bottle of Cabernet Franc

Sunday, April 13, 2 to 5 p.m.

Hosted by Dan Dawson (me) of Eat Drink Cook and Eleven Eleven Winery

At Outer Space Wines, 974 Franklin St, Downtown Napa

Pairing: Taco Bar by Mothers Tacos and other Mexican-inspired bites

More Information

Savor Sunday's: Brunch & Cabernet Sauvignon Pairing Experience

Every Sunday, 11 a.m., through June 8

At Chimney Rock Winery, 5350 Silverado Trail, Napa

More Information

Dan Dawson writes about food and wine in the Napa Valley. Read more from him on his Substack newsletter "Eat Drink Cook."