

# Meet the new generation of industry leaders

## Millennials are the new influencers in the wine world

By Lisa Crovo Dion

It started with a handful of guys and a few bottles covered in brown paper bags. But through the years, the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition has exploded and changed into the world-class contest it is today.

One change was obvious from a single glance around the room at last month's judging. In an industry still largely male dominated, it's clear that women are gaining a foothold — there were more women on the panels than ever before. And some of them were in their 20s and early 30s.

Like their male counterparts, the women who sat on the judging panels have

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taken different paths to the sweepstakes table.

They are writers, winemakers, marketers, educators, managers and sommeliers. One is even the CEO and host of her own digital television show.

"Women are serious wine buyers. We can't be ignored in today's market," says Jess Altieri. "And Millennials are the fastest-growing segment of wine drinkers."

She should know. The 28-year-old Altieri is a certified sommelier, professional wine judge, author and founder of the WineChannelTV Network, a wine lifestyle network focused on Millennials. The network reaches more than 100,000 viewers.

"Just Jess," as she's known in her online community, is part of a new generation of influencers in the wine business. And she's in good company. One of her fellow judges at this year's SFCWC was Shauna Rosenblum, the winemaker at Rock Wall Wine Company in Alameda.

Though Rosenblum grew up a "cellar rat" at her parents' winery (her Girl Scout troop used to stomp grapes at Rosenblum Cellars), she never had aspirations to become a winemaker. Far from it. Instead, she studied painting and sculp-



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Women in their 20s and 30s, such as Jennifer Cossey, Shauna Rosenblum and Jess Altieri, represent the fastest-growing segment of wine drinkers.



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WineChannelTV CEO Jessica Altieri

ture at the California College of the Arts and the San Francisco Art Institute. But after finishing school, she helped out for a summer at Rock Wall. It was then that she realized her passion for making wine.

"I never saw myself as a winemaker for Rosenblum, it was such an old boys club," says Shauna. But her dad Kent had



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Winemaker Shauna Rosenblum

other plans. After graduating, he began grooming her to take over as winemaker for Rock Wall. And by end of the 2008 harvest, she had made her first vintage.

"I became obsessed," says the 30-year-old Rosenblum. "I realized that making wine is a way to create something tangible while fusing art and science."



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Wine journalist Jennifer Cossey

Writer, educator and sommelier, Jennifer Cossey began her wine career in the restaurant business. She took a part-time job at Solano Cellars in Albany, teaching classes on wine to help pay the bills. It was there that she had an epiphany.

"That was it for me," Cossey says. "I was hooked and in love with wine."

Now she also adds "professional wine judge" to her resume.

These three young women not only share a deep passion and knowledge about wine, they also have a solid grip on the importance social media plays in their careers. The generation raised on Facebook and Twitter is thirsty for information and skeptical of advertising.

According to Jezebel.com, Millennials and young Gen-Xers are not into the pretentiousness of wine. They want something authentic that speaks to them. They share recommendations and check status updates to gather information.

"We don't want to be patronized or marketed at. We want to know what our friends are enjoying. And we want something delicious for under \$15," says Shauna Rosenblum.

Jennifer Cossey describes her generation as professional but fun, passionate, creative and not stuffy. Jess Altieri echoes that sentiment, adding adventurous and outgoing to the list.

These trailblazing trendsetters love wine and are changing the game, one Instagram post at a time.