

## Ithaca 2018 Abstract Submission

### Title

Pre-Brexit belt tightening in the UK  
The dumbing down of wine consumption

### I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

### Corresponding Author

Linda Piggott-Vijeh

### E-Mail

[lindavijeh@hotmail.com](mailto:lindavijeh@hotmail.com)

### Affiliation

WSET

### Co-Author/s

Name	E-Mail	Affiliation
Combe St. Nicholas	Combe St. Nicholas	Combe St. Nicholas

### Keywords

Brexit; Consumer Choice; Supermarkets; UK Hospitality Industry

### Research Question

What will be the impact of wine consumption in the UK post-Brexit

### Methods

Independent research, evidence based surveys, WSTA, published articles

### Results

As wine professionals we must aid UK wine consumers in taking back control of what they drink, just as voters have expressed the desire to regain control of their borders

### Abstract

Drip by drip, drop by drop, we are witnessing an unprecedented erosion of consumer wine choice in the UK. The aim of this paper is to consider the impact that a fear of the shape that post-Brexit Britain will take poses for wine enthusiasts, whether as supermarket shoppers for home consumption or as customers in pubs, restaurants and bars.

Whilst there is acknowledgement that tastes do change and develop over time, the pace and extent of such change is dependent on a number of factors, all of which will fluctuate according to circumstances, taking on greater or lesser importance.

In the case of the UK, in the current climate, political and economic considerations are at the forefront, in addition to the sociological and legal implications that a break with the EU will bring about.

As a WSET wine educator, hotel and restaurant standards consultant, wine writer and journalist, I visit hundreds of establishments each year, keeping a keen eye on our emerging eating and drinking habits. As a result, I am finding that through research carried out over many decades, combined with my own extensive collection of food and wine related material, there is increasing evidence that the UK Brexit Referendum in 2016, and the uncertainty of

what the future will hold post-Brexit, has brought about a climate of caution; a wait and see game while the situation remains unclear, and both sides attempt to negotiate an agreement.

In the meantime, it is the consumer who is suffering, largely at the hands of the major chains that dominate the UK hospitality market; their buyers avidly continue their quest for 'bargains' further afield as an insurance policy against unfavourable trade terms with the EU post-Brexit. The result is that we, as consumers, are experiencing an increasingly limited range of options; the pace of such change has quickened and been exacerbated by Brexit anxiety, fuelled by those with their own agenda.

Supermarkets are complicit in this, the driving force behind offering a selection of wines that can be shifted quickly, all the while stocking their shelves with the same dull, money spinning, brands, keeping well within the average price point of £6 a bottle.

UK supermarket shelves may groan under the weight of the 'perceived' choice on offer, but closer inspection reveals the tried and tested marketing skills of product placement and 'gondolier' end of aisle specials; all intended to seduce a price conscious consumer, often with little knowledge of what they are buying. Both here, and in our pubs, bars and restaurants, the consumer palate is being trained to accept, and eventually prefer, what is on offer, rather than demand what they want. A recent survey of drinking habits bears out this theory.

The demise of independent retailers, their knowledge and expertise, has had a marked impact on buying habits. What is being offered has been 'dumbed down' to the point where the limited range of what is readily accessible brings us right back to the early 1970s. A time when the working-classes began to realise, if not quite appreciate, the joys of wine consumption. Mateus Rosé, Black Tower, Liebfraumilch and Piesporter, off-dry cheap and cheerful wines for easy drinking, were the order of the day; Chianti in a straw basket was reserved for special occasions. Forty years on we have come full-cycle, the only difference being that now the choice is largely limited to three reds and three whites (Rioja, Shiraz or Merlot, joined by Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc and Pinot Grigio). Even the ubiquitous Chardonnay has taken a back seat. These screw top wines (an argument for another time), frequently served in 250ml. glasses, cost significantly less for a bottle than is being paid for by the glass. Prosecco, the preferred celebratory option for a night out, is on the wane as demand exceeds the quality of available supplies and prices for wine reach an all-time high.

The argument that this is led by consumer demand is an illusion fuelled by the uncertain future of a hospitality industry mostly dependent upon EU labour. It is what the avaricious shareholders and investors of our multi-chain hospitality outlets want to offer, to ensure maximum return on investment. Meanwhile, customers calculate the cost of a night out, wondering if the money will stretch until the next pay day; if they happen to be in gainful employment that is.

Whilst the wine drinking public continues to be seduced by price, without considering the quality of what is in the glass, this practice will continue.

The evidence gathered from industry sources, in addition to independent surveys, has enabled me to reach the conclusion that UK wine consumers must take back control of what they drink, just as voters have expressed the desire to regain control of their borders.

As wine professionals, it is incumbent upon us to play our part in turning the tide.