

# The New Digital Terroir

**Cultivating Wine  
Communities through  
Substack, Reddit,  
Discord & Podcasts**

**Tyler Balliet  
Morgan First**

Direct to Consumer Wine  
Symposium 2026

# The Internet Isn't One Big Place Anymore

It's fractured into thousands of niche communities where people really care about what they're into.



# Wine Didn't Disappear

**It moved**

Wine drinkers didn't stop caring.

They just stopped hanging out where brands talk at them.

They're in smaller places now.  
With people they trust.  
Talking about things they love.



**This is where sales happen**

# A New Way to Reach Wine Drinkers

Today we're talking about:

- Niche communities
- Where they live online
- How wineries can participate without being cringe
- How this turns into actual DTC sales

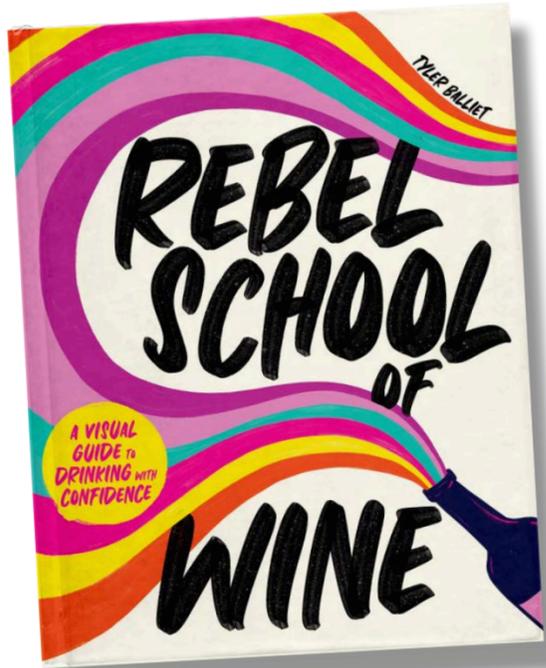


A photograph of two women lying on their backs on a surface covered in colorful confetti. The woman on the left is wearing an orange top and has her eyes closed with a slight smile. The woman on the right is wearing a white top and has her eyes closed and a wide, joyful smile. The confetti consists of small, multi-colored circles and squares in shades of red, yellow, blue, pink, and purple.

**Who are we?**

**and why should you care  
what we have to say?**

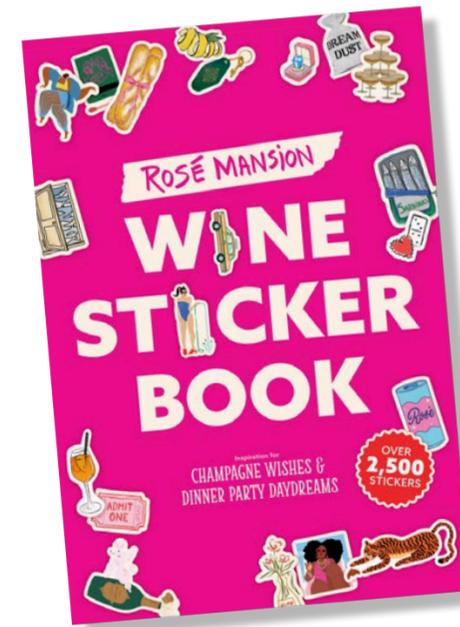
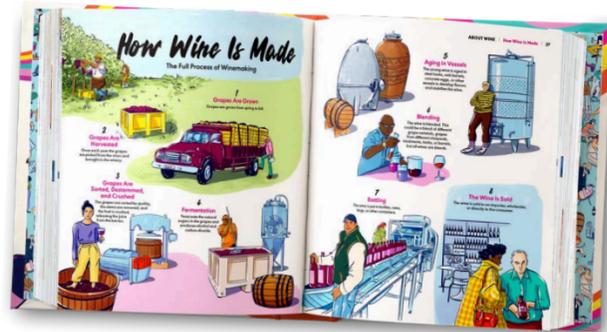
# Changing the Way We Experience Wine for 20 Years



## Rebel School of Wine

2024 - Present

Authored a James Beard Award-nominated wine book with 450+ custom illustrations that became a bestseller.



## Wine Sticker Book

2025 - Present

Launched a wine-themed sticker book that built community with junk journaling and crafting enthusiasts through authentic engagement.



## Rosé Mansion

2018 - 2020

Created a viral 32,000 sqft immersive wine experience that sold 225,000 tickets in 12 months and landed TONS of national press coverage.



## Wine Riot

2009 - 2016

Built and scaled a traveling wine festival to 25,000 tickets annually across 6 major cities. Produced 50+ events over 8 years.

# Our Projects Get Press & Win Awards



**Good Morning America**  
2018 - Rosé Mansion

**ABC News**  
2019 - Rosé Mansion



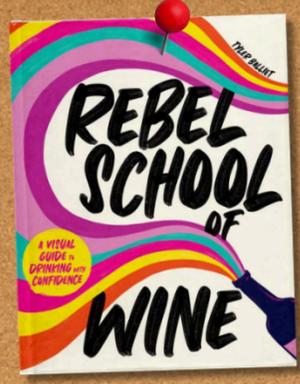
**CNN Business**  
2018 - Rosé Mansion



**ABC7 New York**  
2025 - Rebel School of Wine



**TVA Montreal**  
2023 - Barbie



**James Beard Book Award Nomination**  
2025 - Rebel School of Wine



**Wine Enthusiast 40 Under 40**  
2013 - Tyler Balliet  
2019 - Morgan First



**Inc. Magazine 30 Under 30**  
2010 - Wine Riot



**design:retail 40 Under 40**  
2019 - Morgan First

# Platforms Beyond Meta



## Podcasts

- Long-form storytelling
- Authority, loyalty, parasocial trust
- Where people decide who they believe



## Substack

- Depth without algorithms
- Old school blog posts, articles
- The real comment section



## Reddit

- Honest opinions and early discovery
- Unfiltered feedback
- Where trends surface before they're cool



## Discord

- Organization and access
- Super fans, insiders, power users
- Where communities actually coordinate



## Group Chats

- Real influence
- Recommendations and purchasing decisions
- Where people ask, "Is this good?"

# Fish Where the Fishes are

but Few Fishermen

Engaging with niche communities in a meaningful way can lead to major sales.

**Wine is NOT a niche community**  
(at least not one you want to target)

We're not here to convince people to drink wine. We're looking for existing wine drinkers in OTHER communities.



# Everything Changed

## in the Last 5 Years

### Old Way

- ✗ Join the conversation
- ✗ Engage with top creators
- ✗ Focus on specific media platforms
- ✗ Grab attention

### New Way

- ✓ Join the community
- ✓ Partner with top creators
- ✓ Follow specific communities across platforms
- ✓ Earn trust

**Spray and pray campaigns never really worked  
but now they are completely dead.**

# Choosing the Right Niche Communities



Not all communities are created equal. Here's what to look for:

## 1. Organized Community with Regular IRL Activities

People don't drink wine alone

✓ Board Games    ✗ Crossword Puzzles

## 2. The community becomes part of someone's personality

Half their birthday gifts are themed around it

✓ Golf    ✗ Pilates

## 3. Large Audience of Wine Drinking Adults

We are looking for existing wine drinkers

✓ Skiing    ✗ Crossfit

## 4. They Spend a Lot of Money on the Activity or Community

They have no problem spending lots of money

✓ Vintage Porsche Owners    ✗ Formula 1 Fans

Make sure it's something YOU actually like and enjoy.

# How to Engage & Join the Community

## 1. Where do they communicate online?

Join the Discord, Substack, Reddit threads. Start by lurking.

## 2. Where do they meet in person?

Attend events and meetups. Be nice and build real relationships without selling.

## 3. What do they want?

Listen first. Understand their needs. Don't assume.

## Meet them where they're at

Don't show up and immediately start selling. That's cringe.



# Tailor Your Products to the Community

Show you are part of **THEIR** community.



**Wine Label:** Custom design that speaks to the niche



**Special Packaging:** Make unboxing an experience



**Dedicated Web Page:** Landing page just for this community



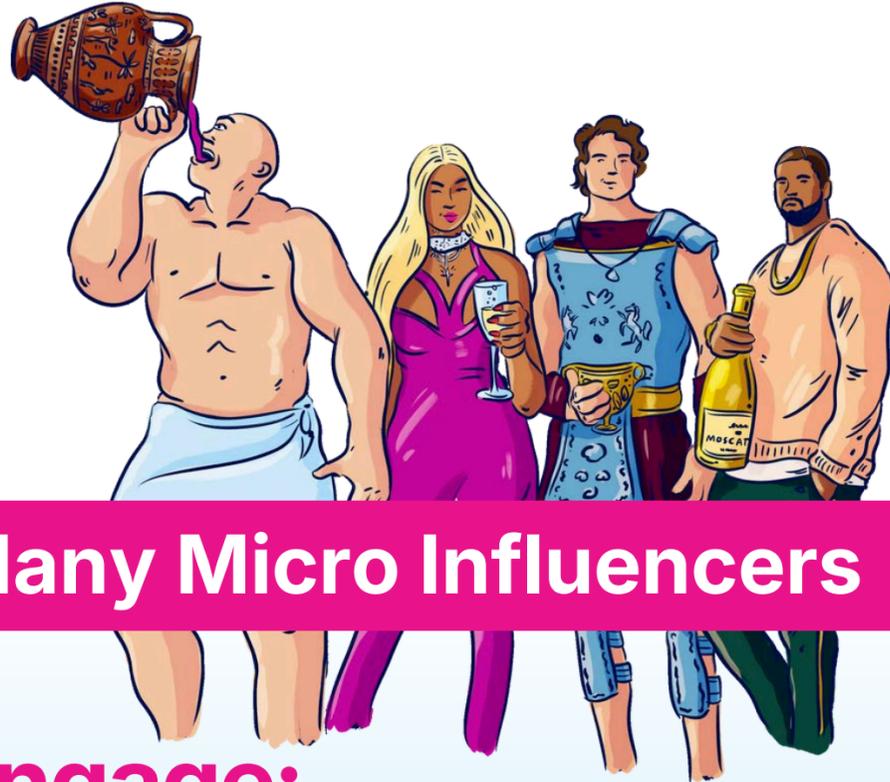
**Special Events:** Host gatherings that matter to them

**The Goal:** Make them feel **SEEN**. Make them feel like the product was made **FOR** them. Because it was.



# Find and Engage Influencers

Partner with smaller creators who actually care about you



Many Micro Influencers



One Big Influencer

## How to engage:

**Podcasts:** Ask to be a guest. Share your story authentically.

**Substack:** Co-author a post about how you make the wine with photos and videos.

**Reddit:** Engage genuinely. Post photos of events. Share real experiences.



## Key Principal

Partner with creators, don't just pay for posts. Build real relationships. They'll champion your products because they actually believe in them.

Non-Wine Themed Example:

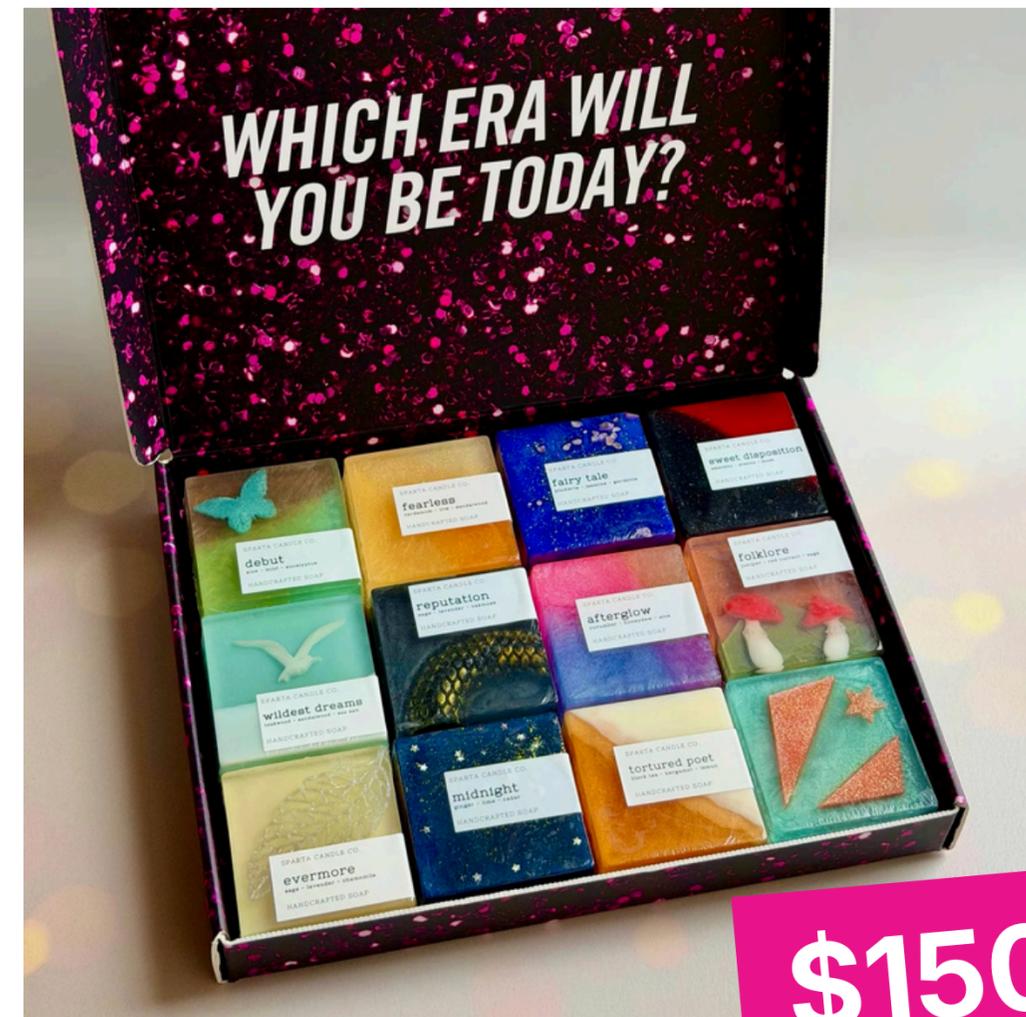
# Sparta Candle Company

## Community:

Taylor Swift Fans (Swifties)

## How They Engage:

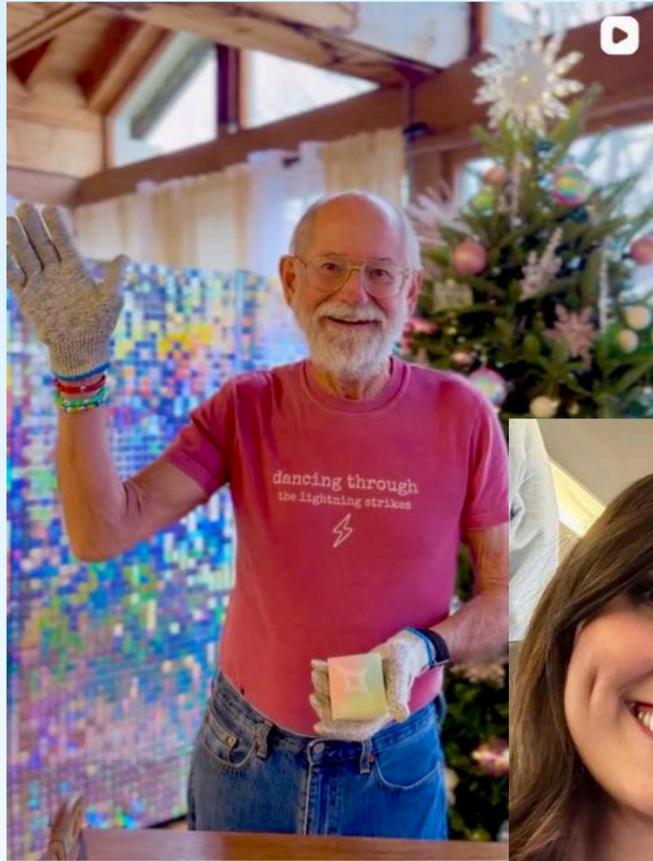
- Create product for the fans
- Attend concerts
- Interact on social media
- Genuinely connect with fans as fans



\$150

Non-Wine Themed Example:

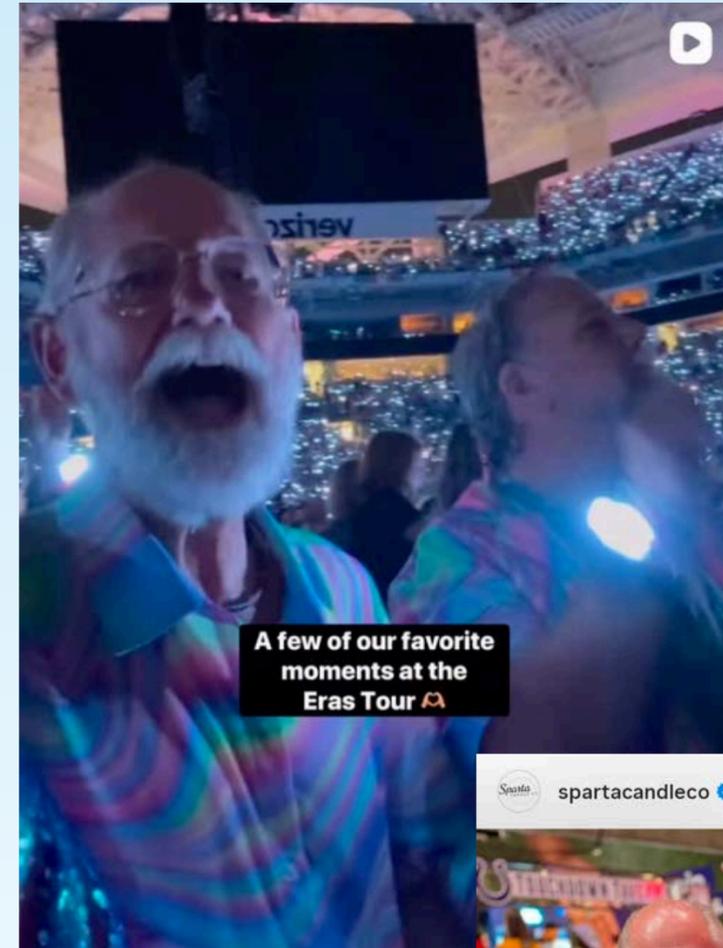
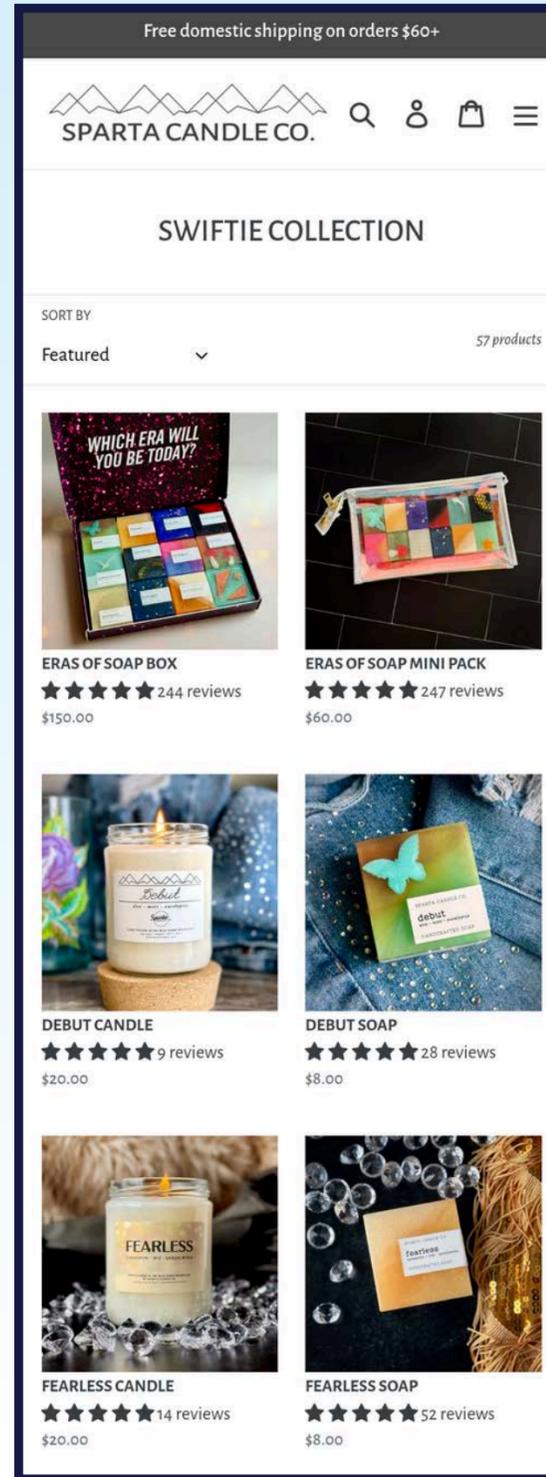
# Sparta Candle Company



Owner and producer



Daughter runs social media



A few of our favorite moments at the Eras Tour 🎶

At the Eras Tour and meeting with fans



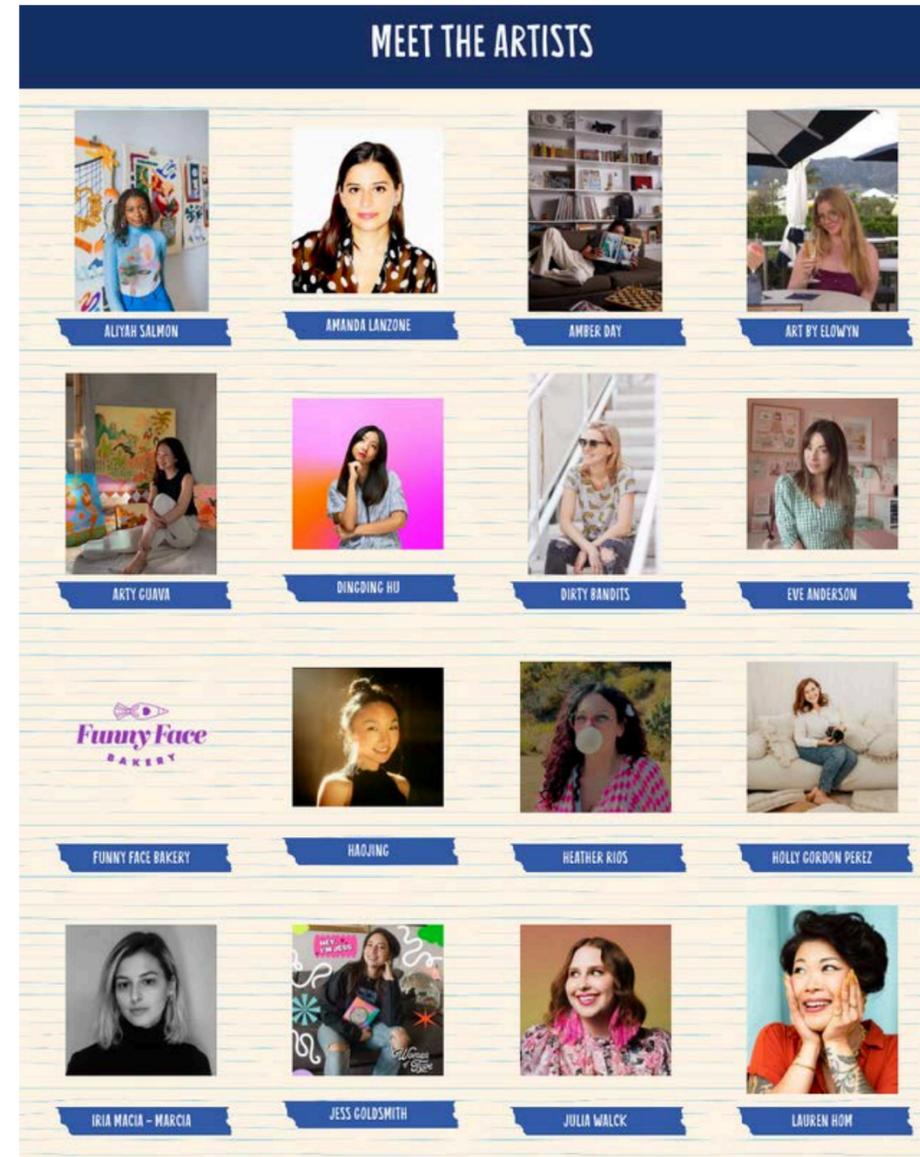


Wine Themed Example:

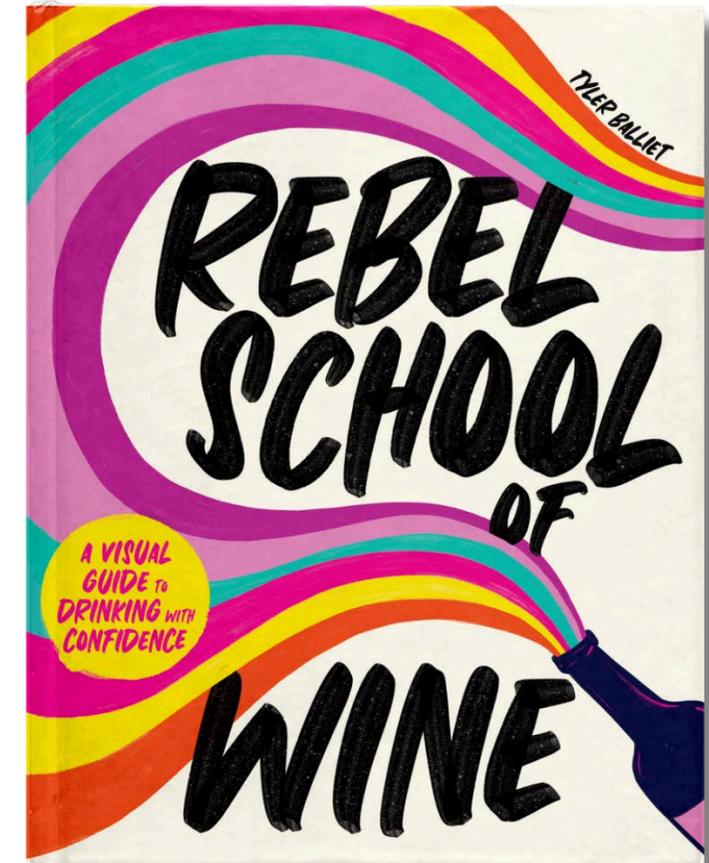
# Rosé Mansion Wine Sticker Book



Sponsor Junk Journal Events



Engage with the 25 Artists and their communities



Existing Rebel School of Wine customers

## Wine Community Example:

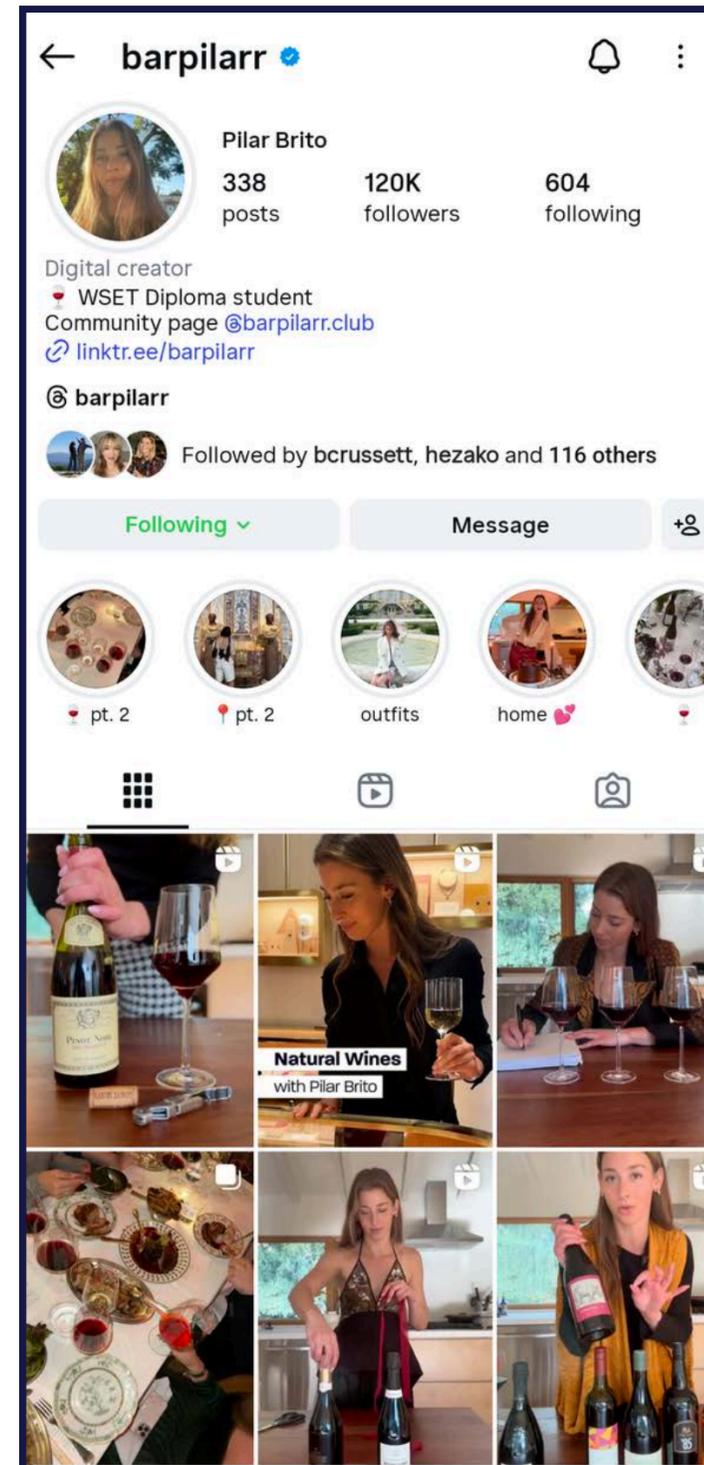
# Bar Pilar aka Pilar Brito

### Communities:

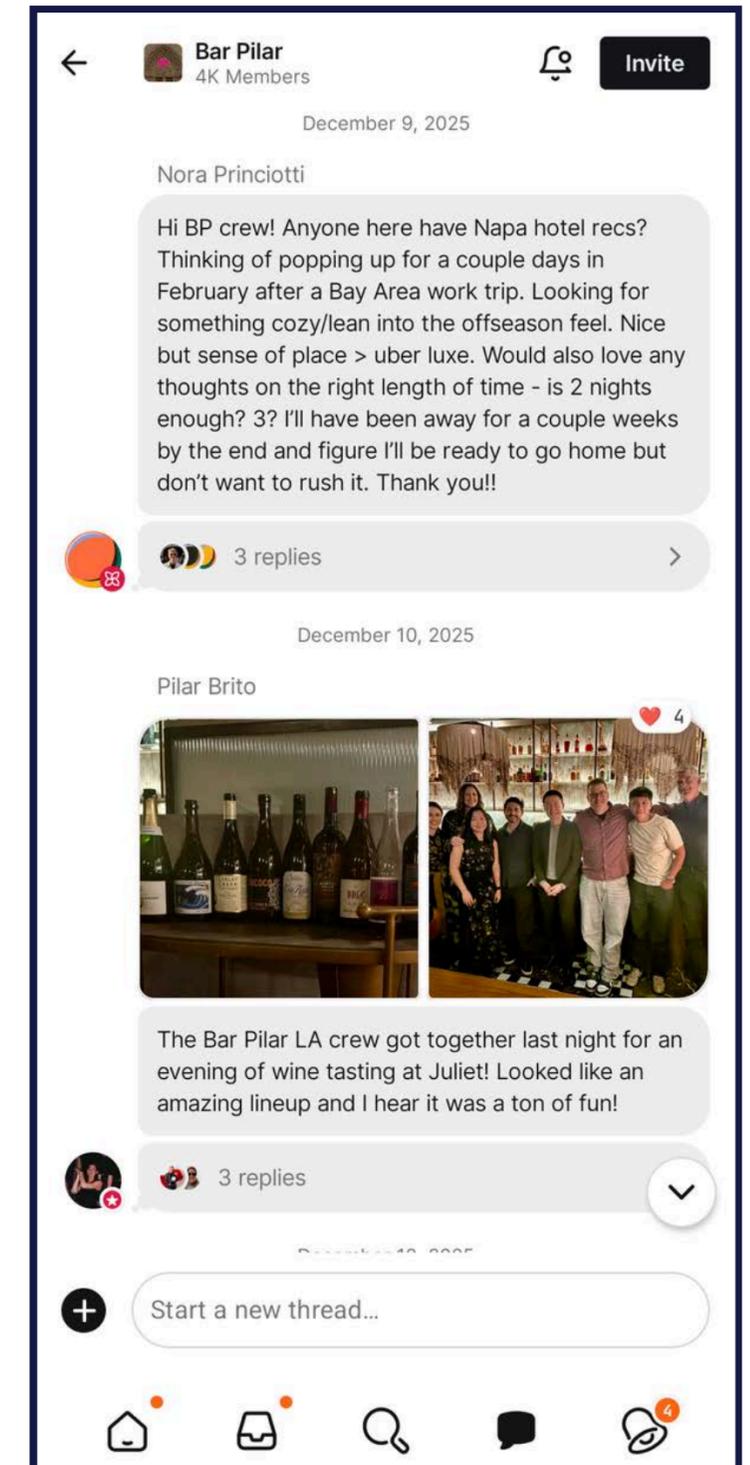
- Lawyers
- MBA Students & Grads
- Business Professionals

### How She Engages:

- Videos: Cult Classics, Name Drop Wines
- Built community on Substack
- Community events and meetup
- The group chat



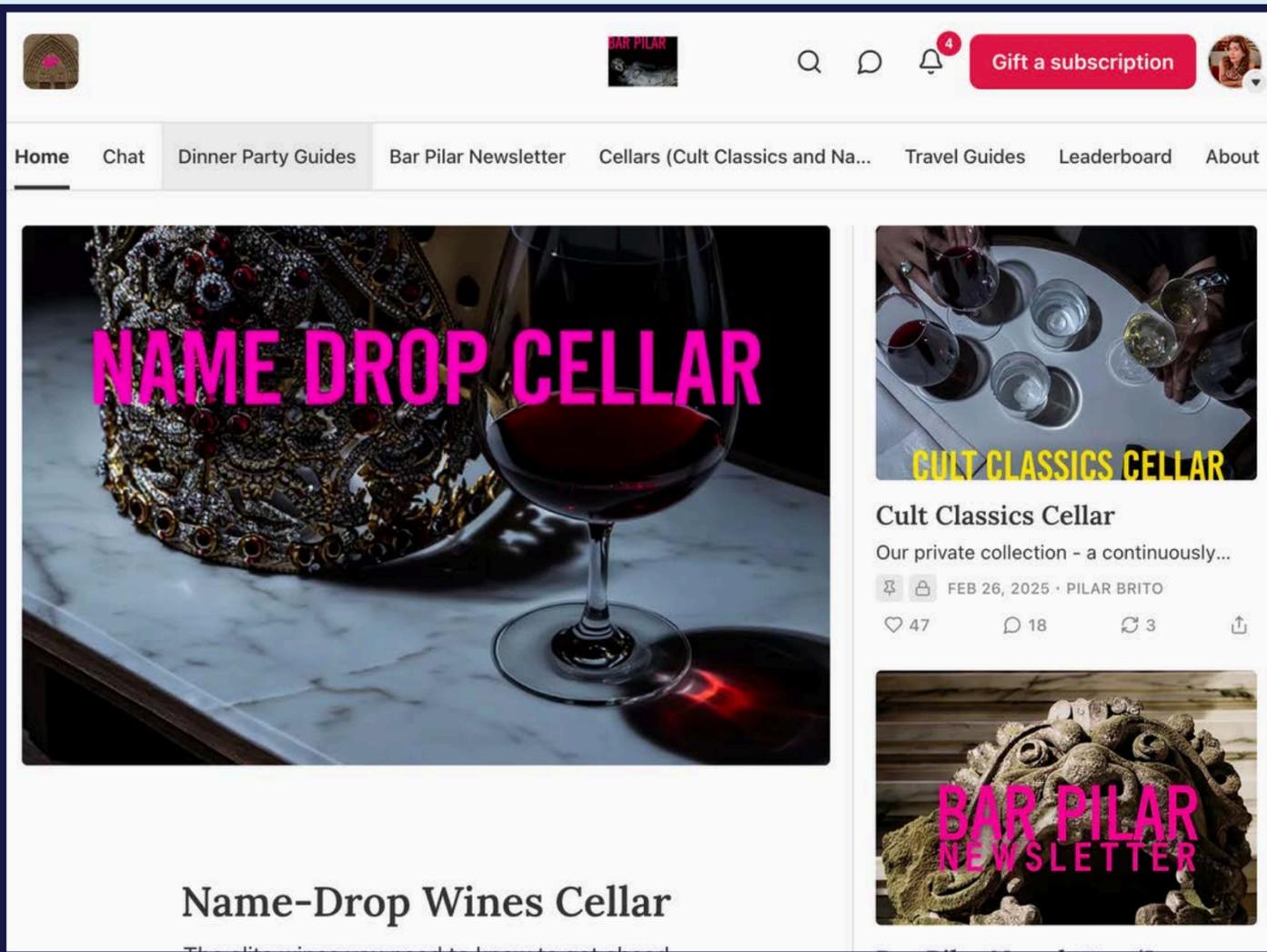
How it Started:  
Instagram



How it's Going:  
Substack

# Wine Community Example:

# Bar Pilar



Content relevant to her community



London community meetup was a Judgment of Paris Tasting



Community Meetup in Brooklyn June 2025

**Wine Targeting a Community:**

# **Black Girl Magic**

**by McBride Sisters**

## **Communities:**

- Essence Festival Attendees
- Black women

## **How They Engage:**

- Sponsor Essence Festival and Events
- Speakers at other events
- Cross platform engagement



Let's Put it All Together

# Wine for Swifties

Someone Please Steal this Example

**The Community:** Adult Taylor Swift Fans

**The Product:** "Main Character Era" Sauvignon Blanc



## How to tailor it:

- **Friendship bracelets** with every bottle
- Packed with **glitter** (changes color based on album)
- Monthly Taylor Swift **parties** at the vineyard
- **Special wine club:** 3 bottles of Main Character Era + 3 bottles of your estate wines

## How to engage influencers:

- **Podcasts:** Be a guest, talk about your experience as a Swiftie and why you created this wine
- **Substack:** Co-author a post about how you make the wine (with photos/videos)
- **Reddit:** Post photos of your Taylor Swift parties, engage with the community

# How to Engage on the Platforms



## Talk Like a Human

People want to engage with other people not a faceless brand



## Make Friends

Show up consistently, add value to conversations, share their content, support their projects. Be a good friend.



## Slide into DMs

Be genuine and start conversations.



# How to Make Meaningful Partnerships

## Key Takeaways:

1. The internet is fragmented into thousands of niche communities
2. **Wine is NOT a niche.** Find where wine drinkers already gather
3. Join, engage, tailor, and partner in that order
4. Many micro-influencers > one major influencer
5. Make your content screenshot-able and easy to share



**This isn't about gaming the algorithm or finding a marketing hack.**

**It's about showing up, being real, and building relationships with communities that actually care about something.**

**Do that and the sales will follow.**

# THANK YOU

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