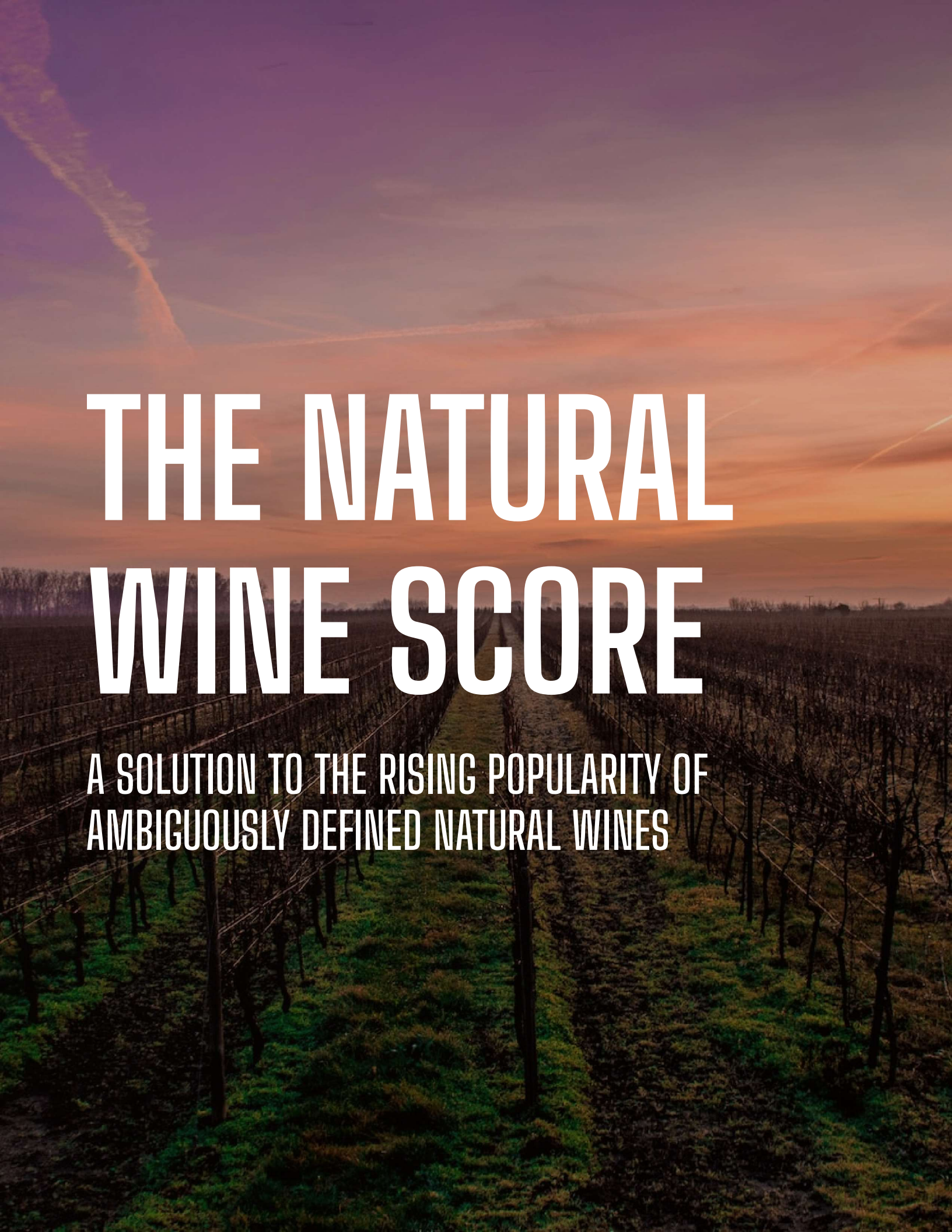


A photograph of a vineyard at sunset. The sky is a mix of purple, orange, and pink, with a bright light source on the right. The vineyard rows are dark and stretch into the distance, with a path visible in the center. The ground is covered in green grass and some low-lying plants.

THE NATURAL WINE SCORE

A SOLUTION TO THE RISING POPULARITY OF
AMBIGUOUSLY DEFINED NATURAL WINES



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global wine community has witnessed an unprecedented surge in the popularity of natural wines. Embracing the essence of authenticity and minimal intervention, natural wines have captured the hearts and palates of wine enthusiasts worldwide. Yet, while the allure of these wines is undeniable, the lack of a standardized definition for "natural wine" has given rise to confusion and debate within the industry.

The absence of a clear-cut and universally accepted criteria for what constitutes a natural wine has led to diverse interpretations and practices among winemakers, resulting in a wide range of products under the ambiguous term "natural wine".

As a result, consumers, producers, and regulatory bodies have grappled with the question of how to ascertain the naturalness of a wine, hindering the movement's potential for further growth and recognition.

This white paper endeavors to dissect the reasons behind the growing popularity of natural wine while addressing the pressing need for a tangible solution – the development of a comprehensive and objective Natural Wine Score.

By introducing an internationally adopted scoring system, we aim to bring clarity and coherence to the realm of natural wines by first, empowering consumers with the knowledge to make more informed choices and second, assisting winemakers in showcasing their commitment to this principled winemaking approach.

THE CHALLENGE OF DEFINING "NATURAL WINE"

The ascent of natural wine as a global phenomenon has been both exhilarating and perplexing. One of the central predicaments that has accompanied its meteoric rise is the lack of a standardized and universally accepted definition for "natural wine."

This ambiguity has given rise to a double-edged sword that simultaneously fuels creativity and diversity among winemakers while generating confusion and skepticism among consumers seeking genuine authenticity and transparency.

In the absence of a clear-cut definition, the term "natural wine" has become a broadly used label that encompasses a wide spectrum of winemaking practices. Various winemakers and regions interpret the concept differently, leading to a diverse range of definitions.

Some adopt a purist stance, adhering strictly to organic or biodynamic viticulture, spontaneous fermentation, and zero additives, while others take a more flexible approach, incorporating some non-interventionist practices but allowing minimal use of sulfites or other substances.

On a positive note, this lack of uniformity can be a source of innovation and creativity, enabling winemakers to experiment with different techniques and express their individuality through their wines.

However, the challenge lies in the difficulty for consumers to navigate this vast landscape, often without clear information on a wine's production methods. As a result, consumers may struggle to distinguish between wines that genuinely align with the natural wine ethos and those that merely employ the label for marketing purposes.



With no standardized criteria to ascertain a wine's "naturalness," consumers may feel uncertain about the authenticity and transparency of the product they are purchasing.

This skepticism extends to both new enthusiasts and seasoned wine connoisseurs who seek reassurance that they're supporting a genuinely eco-conscious and ethical movement rather than a passing trend.

Additionally, the lack of a clear definition opens the door for potential abuse, as some unscrupulous marketers may label their wines as "natural" without adhering to the principles that underpin the movement. This misrepresentation not only erodes trust within the natural wine community but also risks tarnishing the reputation of the movement as a whole.

The challenge of defining "natural wine" represents a pivotal moment for the movement's continued success and growth. While the lack of a standardized definition has allowed for creativity and diversity, it has also created confusion and skepticism among consumers.

By addressing this challenge and establishing a clear and internationally recognized definition, the natural wine community can build trust, maintain authenticity, and foster a sustainable future for one of the most captivating developments in the world of wine.



THE COUNCIL OF NATURAL WINE GEMS

In the pursuit of promoting clarity and consistency within the realm of natural wines, the development of an objective and internationally recognized scoring system emerges as a fundamental step. This scoring system, as we refer to it, the Natural Wine Score, aims to provide consumers, producers, and regulatory bodies with a tangible and standardized assessment of a wine's "naturalness," allowing for informed decision-making and fostering greater transparency across the global wine market.

In order to establish a comprehensive scoring system for determining the naturality of natural wines, we propose forming a committee of recognized natural wine experts. This committee should be composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, including natural winemakers, sommeliers, growers, and sustainability specialists. Their collective knowledge should ensure a well-rounded perspective on natural winemaking, encompassing various aspects of the process.



This committee could be initially called the “Council of Natural Wine GEMS” with GEMS being an acronym for Growers, Experts, Makers, and Sommeliers. The name reflects the inclusion of key stakeholders involved in the natural wine industry, representing different roles in the production, evaluation, and promotion of natural wines. This recognition would add credibility and authority to The Council's decisions and will be essential for widespread acceptance and adoption of the scoring system.

The Council could convene periodically to vote on and update the consensus of what constitutes the International Standard for Natural Wine. This process of regular evaluation and refinement would allow the scoring system to remain relevant and up-to-date with the evolving understanding of natural winemaking practices. The committee's collective knowledge and expertise would ensure that the International Standard encompasses all the crucial elements that define a wine as "natural."

As an international group, the committee members would bring unique perspectives from different regions and philosophies from around the world. This diversity would enable The Council to distill the common denominators of natural winemaking that resonate universally and bridge any cultural or regional gaps. It would also encourage cross-learning and the exchange of best practices among the committee members, contributing to the continuous improvement of the scoring system over time.

In addition to forming, shaping and iterating The Natural Wine Score from scratch, a second, yet equally important task of The Council would be to educate consumers about natural wine and promote best practices in the industry. This educational role would be vital as consumers play a crucial role in encouraging winemakers to adhere to natural winemaking principles. By teaching consumers through a series of online educational courses, the committee would foster an appreciation for the craft and encourage more demand for genuinely natural wines, thereby promoting sustainable practices in the industry.



SCORING CRITERIA & EDUCATING CONSUMERS

The Natural Wine Score should assess a wine's naturalness by considering critical factors that define the movement. These may include, but are not limited to:

1. Viticultural Practices: The score should evaluate the use of organic and biodynamic viticultural methods, such as abstaining from synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers. Practices that encourage biodiversity, soil health, and natural pest control should be given special consideration.

2. Winemaking Techniques: An objective assessment of the winemaking process is essential. Elements such as spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeasts, unfiltered wines, and minimal use of additives should be evaluated. Additionally, the degree of intervention during the winemaking process, such as temperature control or micro-oxygenation, must be taken into account.

3. Additives and Sulfites: The score should quantify the amount of sulfites and other additives used during winemaking. This can help consumers differentiate wines with minimal or no additives from those with significant intervention, fostering greater transparency in the market.

The process of creating a Natural Wine Score would require The Council to develop precise scoring criteria for each factor identified as significant in determining the naturalness of a wine. This would involve establishing an evaluation framework that assigns scores based on the degree to which a wine adheres to natural winemaking practices.

The aim would be to create a comprehensive system that accounts for various aspects of the winemaking process, ensuring that the final score provides an accurate representation of a wine's naturalness.

For each category, specific criteria would be established to define what qualifies for a certain score. For instance, in the viticultural practices category, the criteria might specify the requirements for using organic or biodynamic farming methods, such as avoiding synthetic pesticides and herbicides, implementing composting practices, and fostering soil health.

Wines that meet all the criteria in this category would receive a higher score, while those that only partially meet them would receive a lower score. The Council would then need to determine the weightage assigned to each category within the scoring system. This step would be crucial as it establishes the relative importance of different factors in the overall evaluation.

Some categories may carry more weight than others, reflecting their greater impact on the naturalness of the wine or their alignment with the core principles of natural winemaking.

Once the scoring criteria and weightage for each category are established, the committee should then create a scoring rubric that provides a clear guide for evaluating wines. This rubric would enable consistent and fair assessments of natural wines, irrespective of their origin or the individuals conducting the evaluation.

Periodical virtual meetings could be scheduled at predetermined intervals, such as quarterly or biannually, depending on the frequency of relevant matters arising. The Council members may also be divided into subgroups or task forces responsible for specific aspects of the scoring and educational systems.

These subgroups could conduct in-depth research, analysis and teachings where their findings could be presented and discussed during the virtual meetings and online courses, contributing to the overall refinement and improvement of the Natural Wine Score.



SELF-ASSESSMENT, CERTIFICATION & TRANSPARENCY

Once the scoring system is finalized, it would be vital to establish a credible certification process to validate a wine's Natural Wine Score. Although it should be made as easy as possible for any grower or winemaker to self-assess their own Natural Wine Score through a simple online questionnaire, the Council should organize an independent third party Natural Wine Authority, tasked with auditing wineries and conducting thorough evaluations to ensure compliance with the defined criteria.

An internationally recognized certification body such as a Natural Wine Authority could work in partnership with wine-producing regions and regulatory authorities to implement the Natural Wine Score as a benchmark for quality and authenticity. This approach would foster consumer confidence, enabling consumers to identify and support genuinely natural wines.

Promotional campaigns, educational initiatives, and collaborations with wine influencers and organizations could elevate the visibility and understanding of the Natural Wine Score within the wine community and among consumers across the globe.

Participation from Council members and influential wine regions as well as other respected wineries would be instrumental in driving broader acceptance of the scoring system. As the movement gains traction, it has the potential to become an essential component of wine labels, enabling consumers to make informed choices and cultivating a deeper appreciation for natural winemaking practices worldwide.

Empowered with a Natural Wine Score, consumers could step into a new era of wine purchasing, armed with invaluable knowledge that empowers them to make more informed choices and align their preferences and values with their wine selections. This standardized scoring system has the potential to transform the consumer experience, enhance transparency in the market, and catalyze a significant shift in demand towards genuinely natural wines.

This standardized scoring system has the potential to transform the consumer experience, enhance transparency in the market, and catalyze a significant shift in demand towards genuinely natural wines. The Natural Wine Score would equip consumers with a tangible and easily understandable metric to assess a wine's "naturalness." No longer reliant solely on labels or marketing claims, consumers would gain access to detailed information about a wine's production methods, viticultural practices, and winemaking techniques. Having gained this comprehensive knowledge, consumers could confidently evaluate whether a wine aligns with their personal values and ethical considerations.



As consumers become more educated about the scoring system and its underlying criteria, they would gain confidence in distinguishing genuine natural wines from those that may not fully align with the movement's principles. Trust in the score would grow and consumers would begin to view it as a reliable indicator of a wine's authenticity and adherence to ethical winemaking practices.

With empowered consumers, the market demand for genuinely natural wines would be primed to soar. Wineries that embrace natural winemaking practices would benefit from increased recognition and support. This, in turn, would serve as a powerful incentive for more winemakers to embrace sustainable and minimal interventionist methods, as they recognize the value of meeting consumer preferences.

Perhaps most importantly, The Natural Wine Score would spark meaningful dialogue between winemakers and consumers. As consumers become more curious about the scoring system and its implications, they would engage in more conversations with winemakers, seeking to understand the philosophy behind their wines and the choices made during production. In turn, winemakers would have an opportunity to share their passion for natural winemaking, elucidate their sustainability practices, and connect with consumers on a deeper level. This exchange of ideas would foster a sense of community between winemakers and wine enthusiasts, cultivating a more profound appreciation for the craft and the commitment to preserving the environment.

FACILITATING GROWTH & GLOBAL RECOGNITION

The introduction of an objective rating system, such as the Natural Wine Score, would herald a transformative era for winemakers dedicated to natural winemaking practices. As wineries embrace this credible standard, it would become a powerful tool for showcasing their unwavering commitment to authenticity, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. The positive impact of this rating system would resonate across multiple dimensions, fostering growth within the natural wine community and propelling the movement towards unprecedented international recognition and respect.

For winemakers who espouse the principles of natural winemaking, the Natural Wine Score would provide an invaluable opportunity to showcase their dedication and transparency to the consumer. By earning a high score, wineries would establish themselves as pioneers in the natural wine movement, reinforcing their commitment to eco-friendly practices and minimal intervention techniques. This objective recognition would encourage winemakers to take pride in their sustainable efforts and foster a sense of unity within the natural wine community. As more wineries join the ranks of those with high Natural Wine Scores, a collective narrative would emerge, solidifying the movement's impact on the wine industry and its potential to reshape the future of winemaking.

As the Natural Wine Score becomes more prevalent, it would serve as an educational tool, elevating consumer awareness about natural winemaking principles and their impact on the environment and wine quality. Consumers would begin to appreciate the significance of choosing wines with higher scores, understanding that their choices contribute to the growth of the natural wine movement and the preservation of sustainable winemaking practices.



CONCLUSION

The rising popularity of natural wine reflects an intrinsic human yearning for authenticity and a profound connection to nature. However, without a standardized approach to discern the naturalness of these wines, their potential for continued growth and recognition is hindered. This white paper proposes the creation of a unified Natural Wine Score as a transformative solution, empowering consumers and winemakers alike, unifying the natural wine community, propelling the movement forward.

However, as the natural wine movement surges forward, it faces an inherent challenge – the lack of a definitive and consistent way to discern the "naturalness" of these wines. The absence of a universally accepted standard has given rise to confusion and skepticism among consumers and the wine community alike. The quest for authenticity and transparency in wine becomes an enigmatic voyage, where a wine labeled "natural" may encompass a wide spectrum of production methods and philosophies, leaving consumers uncertain about what truly lies within the bottle.

This white paper illuminates the need for a unified Natural Wine Score, designed to provide a comprehensive and objective assessment of a wine's "naturalness." Such a scoring system transcends borders and regions, serving as an indispensable compass for both consumers and winemakers navigating the intriguing landscape of natural wines. By forging a clear and internationally recognized standard, this vision seeks to unlock the full potential of natural wine, liberating it from the confines of ambiguity and transforming it into a celebrated universal standard cherished by oenophiles around the world.