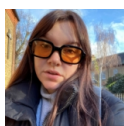


## Lifestyle

# The rise of Chin Chin, the unfussy, well-made wine all the cool kids are drinking

During the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, this Portuguese white wine went viral in the same way as banana bread, quizzes and moderate depression – and its reputation has kept growing ever since. It is now astronomically popular



By Lauren O'Neill

April 18, 2022 7:00 am (Updated April 19, 2022 5:59 pm)

A friend told me last weekend how she'd seen three people on the bus each holding a bottle of the same wine. Maybe they were going to a party or a [bring-your-own-booze](#) dinner, she thought. Either way, she knew the wine as soon as she saw the bright yellow label accented with red and purple: Chin Chin.

Particularly popular among drinkers in their 20s and 30s, the merrily named Vinho Verde also became symbolic of a new type of wine consumer.

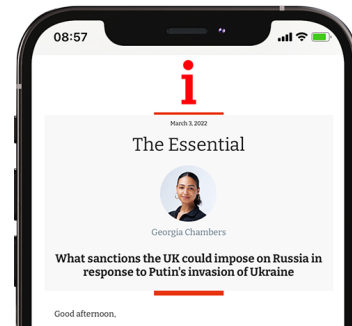
When you have a sip, it's no surprise that its crisp taste is so crowd pleasing, but there are lots of nice wines out there. What's made this one so fashionable?

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Charlotte Leith, who works in food and drink brand development for the Edinburgh-based agency Lux, says Chin Chin has become a leader among drinkers who tend to be younger and more environmentally conscious drinkers.

But Leith, who frequently hears from wine companies wanting to replicate Chin Chin's rise, says that its branding has also played a huge part, thanks to the "bold, illustrative style" of its bottle.

"It feels very different to stuffy, old, traditional wines," she says of its instantly recognisable packaging. "That kind of branding breaks down some of the barriers associated with wine, because you can go into a wine shop without feeling like you're out of your depth."

The fact it isn't available in supermarkets has also helped it maintain its trendy appeal, stopping it from becoming too ubiquitous.





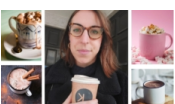
The Portuguese went viral in lockdown (Photo: Shop Cuvée)

The story of its rise began in the London restaurant and wine bar Noble Rot, which opened its first branch in Bloomsbury in 2015. Its co-founder, Mark Andrew, has an aversion to elitism and has always wanted to “talk about wine the way we talked about other things we loved, like football and music”, he tells **i** over the phone between visits to vineyards in Greece.

In 2017, Andrew started a wine import company with his business partner Dan Keeling, aiming to supply bars and restaurants including Noble Rot – where the menu really needed a new house white.

Keeling and Andrew knew they wanted a Vinho Verde in the starring role because the variety had worked well for them in the past. And when they met winemaker Antonio Monteiro, a retired agronomy professor who farms sustainably at his 15-hectare farm in Quinta do Ermizio in northern Portugal, they found what they were looking for.

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Keeling and Andrew already had the name “Chin Chin” in mind – “We wanted the wine to be fun!” Andrew says with a laugh – and to design the label they approached [artist Jose Miguel Mendez](#). His doodley style is very much of the aesthetic zeitgeist when it comes both social media and homewares, explains Andrew, and his idea “just worked straight away”.

While Chin Chin was a hit at restaurants including London’s Top Cuvée and Brat, it was in independent bottle shops where its popularity really took off.

The reason you can’t find it in Tesco or Sainsbury is simply because it’s not made in great enough volume to meet that demand, Andrew explains. “This is the kind of wine that would always be in restaurants and independent wine merchants, and we’re happy with that, because it’s reflective of the care that goes into making the wine,” he says.

Chin Chin’s bottle-shop boom around the UK was most pronounced during lockdown, when a trip down to local stores was the most interesting thing a lot of people did all week.

Brodie Meah, co-founder of Finsbury Park’s Top Cuvée and its offshoot wine store Shop Cuvée, noticed that interest in wine shot up during this time. “People had a bit more cash, because they weren’t going out to restaurants or on holiday. They would be like, ‘Well we’re staying in tonight so we might as well buy a bottle of wine, and we’re going to cook a nice meal,’” he says.





It was in independent bottle shops that Chin Chin's popularity really took off (Photo: Shop Cuvée)

At £12 a bottle – which is not cheap, but certainly a bit more affordable than many specialist wines – Chin Chin was a good place for many people to develop their knowledge of wine.

Many of them were younger drinkers, and Leith says that Chin Chin “would definitely appeal more to a millennial or Gen Z audience in terms of how it looks.”

Victoria, 28, an artist manager in London, got into Chin Chin during lockdown after seeing it on social media. It led her to learn about the world of wine, having previously been “happy just to buy whatever £6 wine was on offer”.

“A nice bottle of wine at the weekend was a nice treat to break up the week,” says Victoria. “I liked Chin Chin's design, which felt a lot more modern compared to the more traditional wine labels I was used to.”

Its appeal, however, is not limited to newer wine drinkers. Julie, 39, a professional in Edinburgh, enjoys “a variety of different wines” and buys “a mixture to suit different tastes and moods”. Chin Chin appealed to her because she “loved the colourfulness of the bottle,” though it was the taste that she really fell for.

Post-lockdown, Chin Chin has remained astronomically popular. “There's a long queue of people who, if there was more availability, would like to sell it,” says Andrew.

One brand is not going to change elitism in wine. Many people who enjoy drinking the stuff still find restaurants and bottle shops intimidating and exclusive spaces. But Chin Chin at least has become a go-to for drinkers looking for something well-made and unfussy that also tastes good and doesn't cost the earth.

Andrew puts the wine's philosophy best: "Chin Chin doesn't need to be a wine that you spend 20 minutes writing tasting notes about," he says. "We just want people to drink it with the people they love." 

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