

Blue wine? A tea-infused vintage? Spain startup shakes things up

October 17 2018, by Marianne Barriaux



Blue wine? Nearly half a million bottles were sold last year by Gik Live! a Spanish startup set up by a group of university students

Five years ago, a group of university students in Spain's Basque Country decided they wanted to shake up a sector—any sector—but preferably

one to do with food or drink.

So Imanol, Inigo, Gorka, Aritz and Taig picked the most traditional of them all—and created blue [wine](#), one of several innovations in a deeply conservative industry.

After two years of research at the University of the Basque Country with the help of in-house, professional chemical engineers and an outside centre for food innovation, they launched their [company](#) Gik Live! in 2015.

It sold 30,000 bottles in its first year and close to 500,000 in 2017.

The young company now exports to 21 countries, the United States being its main market... and wine-loving France its second.

From five rookie entrepreneurs, the company has grown to 12 employees.

"We understand that for many people... wine is something sacred that mustn't be changed," says Irish-Basque co-founder Taig Mac Carthy, standing at a bar in the company office in Portugalete, a northern town near Bilbao.

"But we like to change things and we're not afraid to try," he adds, as employees type at their computers in the room next door where a drum kit and guitars stand ready for use in true hipster startup tradition.



Electric blue in colour, the wine is made of mainly white wine with a small amount of red and a tiny bit of freshly-crushed grape juice, with the colour coming from two pigments. The blue colour is obtained via a mix of "nature and technology" using two pigments—anthocyanin, found in the skin of red grapes, and indigo carmine.

Blue recipe

One look at a glass of blue wine can be enough to send sommeliers scurrying.

Electric blue in colour, Gik Blue is made in several wineries in Spain following the traditional winemaking process.

As well as being sold online, some bars, restaurants and shops in Spain sell it.

The recipe?

Mix a lot of white wine with a smaller amount of red wine, and a tiny bit of must, or freshly-crushed grape juice.

The blue colour is obtained via a mix of "nature and technology" using two pigments—anthocyanin, found in the skin of red grapes, and indigo carmine.



"We knew Gik Blue would polarise opinion," says Aritz Lopez, a co-founder of Gik Live! which produces blue wine

The company won't divulge any more of what they say is their "industrial secret."

Gik Live used to use sugar substitutes but now adds dessert wine instead to get a sweet taste.

Other brands have followed suit in Spain including a blue sparkling cava, and the company has created other types.

There is red wine infused with Earl Grey tea, [white wine](#) infused with Japanese Sencha tea, or spicy [red wine](#) named "Bastarde."

Prices online range roughly from 11 to 13 euros (\$13 to \$15) a bottle and clients are usually aged 25 to 45, men and women alike, says the company.

Chinese counterfeit

The reaction to blue wine has been decidedly mixed.

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