This Sommelier’s ‘Laughable’ Idea Is Disrupting the $385 Billion Wine Industry

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As a sommelier at prestigious, Michelin-starred restaurants and with a background in sustainable agriculture, Kristin Olszewski wanted to make organic, high-quality wine more accessible to people who would typically shy away from it.

Her solution: Put it in a can.

In 2017, she launched her canned wine company, Nomadica, into the market—curated, zero-sugar wine in eco-conscious packaging. But not everyone was enamored. For many in the traditional wine industry, canned wine was hard to swallow.

“When I launched, canned wine was all value wines, nothing you’d actually wanna pour into a glass,” Olszewski recalls. “I can’t tell you how often I was laughed out of rooms when I started to go around and pedal Nomadica to people. Even my community and friends in the wine industry were like, why are you doing this? No one wants this.”

Turns out they were wrong. Nomadica is now available direct-to-consumer and in retailers across 25 states such as Whole Foods, Sprouts, and Total Wine, with Target in the works for 2025 Last year, Nomadica was named the Rising Drinks Brand of the Year in the Next Wave Awards.

Olszewski joined me on the One Day with Jon Bier podcast to talk about her path from a Harvard dropout to the founder of a successful company and her advice for aspiring entrepreneurs.

Have a unique expertise in your industry

Kristin spent years as a sommelier in high-end restaurants in Nantucket, Nashville, and New York. That professional experience, coupled with her study in sustainable agriculture, gives her unicorn status in the canned wine industry. “I’m the only founder with wine experience. Everyone else has MBAs, or they hired people to manage the wine experience part of it,” she says. “I’m the only person looking at the industry from the bottom up.”

This unique perspective allows Kristin to identify trends and opportunities others may miss. She shares one example: “I run a wine program in Los Angeles, and I saw that we sold more orange wine by the glass than all other colors combined. Boom. I was the first to market with a nationally distributed orange wine in a can and now box.”

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Build real relationships with board members and investors

Kristin prides herself on being very open and honest with her investors about the challenges Nomadica faces. She surrounds herself with a board composed mostly of operators with experience running businesses and can support her through the ups and downs. Full disclosure: I was one of Kristin’s earliest angel investors and wrote her the biggest check I had written to date because she checked every box for me.

Pay attention to emerging trends and consumer preferences.

Despite Nomadica's success, Kristin is not resting on her laurels. She is constantly trying to innovate and be on top of changes in the industry. For example, she recognizes that millennials and Gen Z are becoming more discerning about what they consume, which contradicts conventional wisdom that these generations just go for fancy labels and marketing gimmicks.

"This is an incredibly educated consumer who's nerdy, who deep dives on what they're consuming now," she says.

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Stay true to your style

Kristin intentionally built Nomadica slowly, starting with partnerships at premium hotels and venues. Contrary to the advice she received, she focused on generating high-velocity sales before expanding into mass retail.

"I took this slow, hard path because I feel like that's also just my vibe, that's my energy. I never do anything the easy way, which is annoying about me. All my friends are endlessly irritated about that, but I knew this was the right way to build the brand, and now we're ready for retail."

Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo

As a female founder in a male-dominated industry, Kristin faced a lot of skepticism and pushback when she launched Nomadica. But she persevered with her vision to disrupt the wine industry and make it less pretentious.

Nobody is laughing at her crazy idea anymore.

“When you look at the wine industry right now, the only segments that are growing are sparkling, canned wine that’s above $15, which is exactly where we’re priced,” she says. “I feel like while everyone else is divesting or making canned cocktails out of wine, I’m leaning in because I still see the opportunity.”

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