

The Wine Windows of Florence

Echoes of another pandemic and another century

By **Mark Spivak** - August 26, 2020




Pandemics are hardly new. Black plague raged across Europe from the 14th to 17th centuries, killing an estimated third of the population; close to one million people died in northern Italy in the outbreak that began in 1629.

Then as now, commerce was severely limited by the pestilence, but the wine merchants of Florence came up with a unique way of continuing to supply their customers. They used windows cut in the façade of their Florentine palaces to dispense wine in an early and successful contactless system. The wine windows dated to 1559 and allowed producers such as the Antinori and Frescobaldi families to sell wine out of their homes.

They passed a flask of wine through the window to the client, who then placed coins on a metal pallet; the merchant disinfected the coins with vinegar before handling them. In cases where a customer brought a flask to be refilled, the merchant inserted a metal tube into a demijohn of wine and filled the flask through the window with the use of gravity. The system was beneficial during a period when drinking water was often unsafe and wine was prized for its medicinal value.





Get the Inside Scoop ✕

Each week, we deliver a curated list of the hottest, most up-to-date happenings and trends. Can we add you to our list?

[Sign Me Up!](#)



In Italy, the past is usually right around the corner. Three Florentine Wine Window Association in 2015 (buchettedelvino.org), with the go

architectural history. Their timing was fortuitous: As the COVID-19 quarantine was eased in Italy, enterprising merchants were able to sell wine, coffee, cocktails, sandwiches and ice cream through the wine windows, many of which had been boarded up for centuries.

While no one knows exactly how many *buchette del vino* exist, the Wine Window Association estimates the total at 200; most of those are in Florence, where there is one for nearly each block in the city. Their 17th century version of contactless delivery resonated during the pandemic, and they became one of the things that allowed Italians to brighten their daily routine and return to some semblance of normalcy.

Mark Spivak specializes in wine, spirits, food, restaurants and culinary travel. He is the author of several books on distilled spirits and the cocktail culture. His first two novels, *Friend of the Devil* and *The American Crusade*, are available on Amazon; his third novel, *Impeachment*, will be released on October 15

Facebook Comments

**Get the Inside Scoop** ✕

Each week, we deliver a curated list of the hottest, most up-to-date happenings and trends. Can we add you to our list?

[Sign Me Up!](#)