

# "Spontea Isn't Trying to Replace Traditional Wine; It's Creating a New Category That Can Share the Table with It"

**Interview with Kendra Sepulveda, Founder of Spontea**

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After nearly a decade of research, Kendra Sepulveda has developed **Spontea**, a fermented beverage made from wine and kombucha that aims to establish a new category within the NoLo (No and Low Alcohol) segment. In this interview, the founder discusses the technical challenges behind the project, explains the potential of hybrid fermented beverages, and reflects on the opportunities they offer the wine industry at a time when consumer drinking habits are changing.

**To begin, what exactly is Spontea, and how would you define the concept of a kombucha made from wine?**

Spontea is a premium fermented beverage based on wine and kombucha. The project brings together tea fermentation with traditionally vinified grapes, creating a sophisticated, low-alcohol drink designed for fine dining and discerning palates.

Our first collection features a single-varietal Xarel·lo made from locally grown vineyards, as well as a Rosé crafted from a selection of Garnacha, Trepát, and Sumoll grapes from the Penedès region.

I have always had a deep respect for wine—for the art of winemaking, its history, its traditions, and the culture surrounding it. That passion and precision inspire and guide me as I apply the same level of care to crafting Spontea through natural fermentation.

I am fascinated by the stories the land can tell through a grape variety when it is treated with care, respect, and diligence. The beauty of terroir, the emotion embedded in agriculture, and the devotion required to create something meaningful and artistic deserve to be preserved while

being directed toward new purposes in modern ways. Spontea is my personal expression of that balance and philosophy, conveyed through the art of fermentation.

This project has taken years to develop. I have spent a long time dreaming of this moment and working tirelessly to find the right framework that could integrate the worlds of wine and kombucha—not by forcing them together, but by allowing them to speak naturally through the product while remaining faithful to science and discovery.

As you can imagine, this has not been the easiest path. There are certainly shortcuts and techniques that many people would consider logical, practical, and efficient for creating a beverage, but that is not how I approach the process. I believe this new creation deserves hard work, constant precision, and deliberate adjustments guided by sensory evaluation.

**What role does wine play in the project, and what does it contribute—both sensorially and in terms of brand identity—compared with other kombuchas on the market?**

The most important thing to understand about Spontea is that it is neither kombucha nor wine. It is the result of combining the science of fermentation from both worlds to create something different—and perhaps unique—that serves people looking for the sophistication, depth, and experience associated with wine (and sparkling wines such as Cava or Prosecco), while also opening up an entirely new space. Spontea can be served to the whole family. It can be opened at times of the day when wine might not be appropriate. Rather than weighing down the occasion, it elevates it. And there is also a sense of adventure in trying something new.

Our team follows neither traditional winemaking methods nor conventional kombucha production techniques—not out of principle, but because neither approach works for what we wanted to achieve. We had to innovate and pay extremely close attention to fermentation. That is why I do not believe Spontea should be directly compared with either category. Spontea is its own expression. It is another option at the table—something fun, unique, sophisticated, and above all, delicious. Because if it isn't delicious, why make it at all.

**Your company comes at a time when consumers are seeking more sophisticated and complex beverages within the NoLo category. What made you think wine could become an interesting foundation for developing a kombucha?**

The idea actually predates the trend by almost ten years. At the time, I was working in a two-Michelin-star restaurant and began experimenting with different ingredients to create complex and interesting pairings for the tasting menu. It wasn't a response to the market—it was simply a form of creative exploration. I had the opportunity to work with Xarel·lo grape must, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. That experience convinced me there was something special worth developing.

There was also a more personal motivation behind the project. I have always felt the need to work with ingredients that represent the people and the land where a product is created. In Spain, grapes are an entirely logical, sophisticated, and brilliant medium for expressing that connection.

The last ten years have been devoted to refining that idea and, above all, mastering the art of fermentation so it can express what I consider desirable from a sensory perspective.

As I mentioned, existing techniques from adjacent disciplines simply could not be transferred to Spontea. Because my background is in culinary arts and fine dining, I let taste guide the process. As in wine culture, my understanding of fermentation has always revolved around balance, texture, emotion, and the experience at the table. Spontea was never designed as a market-driven product, the expression of an ideology, or the solution to a commercial problem. It was born on the palate—for moments that needed exactly that flavor.

### **From both a technical and sensory perspective, what have been the greatest challenges in working with wine within a fermentation process like kombucha?**

From both a technical and sensory standpoint, the greatest challenge has been learning how to balance two fermentation systems that were never designed to coexist naturally.

Wine is a finished product in terms of alcoholic fermentation, with a very well-defined structure, whereas kombucha is a living, dynamic system that is constantly evolving. When you introduce one into the other, you must thoroughly understand how the acids, polyphenols, residual sugars, and aromatic compounds interact and change over time.

Another major challenge has been controlling the fermentation without sacrificing expression. It is very easy for the result to become overly aggressive or unstable if it is not managed with precision. My work has focused on finding a point of balance where the fermentation remains alive while also being elegant, clean, and consistent.

From a sensory perspective, the challenge has been moderating that natural intensity so that it builds the product rather than dominates it.

When you have spent your career working on projects centered around preserving aroma and identity through innovation, fermentation in Spontea becomes precisely that: a controlled transformation of agricultural identity.

I do not dealcoholize a finished wine. Instead, I listen to the fermentation itself, balancing two living systems to create something new that still expresses the essence of the grape. This aligns with what you have written before—that innovation should expand access without erasing the soul of the raw material.

I would also add that remaining faithful to the expression of each grape variety has been essential. Every variety contributes a different identity, and the goal has always been to respect that uniqueness throughout the process.

My background is in the culinary world, so I have always regarded fermentation as both a creative tool and a discipline requiring timing, precision, and sensitivity. Within Spontea, achieving that balance has probably been the most difficult—and at the same time the most fascinating—part of the project.

## **Wine carries deep cultural and gastronomic significance, particularly in Mediterranean countries. How have consumers and professionals reacted when they discover a kombucha made from wine?**

As discussed in books such as *Wine Science* by Ronald Jackson and *Wine and the Vine* by Tim Unwin, wine has always been a direct expression of the land, the climate, and cultural adaptation throughout the Mediterranean. The consumption of seasonal products, nutrient-rich ingredients, and locally sourced raw materials has historically been part of that culture. It was important to me that Spontea fit naturally within that philosophy. Today we are also living through a period of significant transformation. Climate change is directly affecting grape ripening and sugar levels, while at the same time consumers are clearly moving toward more mindful alcohol consumption. My intention has been to connect these two realities: to harness the enormous potential of grape must and transform it through fermentation into something entirely new and wonderful to enjoy.

More than anything, I want people to approach Spontea with curiosity and an open mind—not constantly comparing it to something they already know, but allowing themselves to discover a different experience within occasions, places, and moments that are already precious to them. Precious to us. Precious to me. To me, this is what innovation means: protecting and sustaining what we love while deliberately and consciously adapting to change.

As for the second part of your question, it has actually been industry professionals who have most encouraged me to bring Spontea to a wider audience. Chefs, food journalists, winemakers, and sommeliers were the first to understand what I was trying to achieve and to recognize the beverage's gastronomic and sensory potential. In particular, sommelier **Amador Marín** played a key role during the early stages of the project. He believed in the concept from the beginning, encouraged me to continue developing it, and helped identify wineries and grape varieties that could harmonize with the world of fermentation. In fact, he is probably one of the main reasons I ultimately decided to turn Spontea into a commercial reality.

For many years, this remained simply a personal exploration of fermentation and food pairing. However, the response from professionals in the industry convinced me that there was room for something like this at the modern dining table.

That has become evident in the first restaurants to include Spontea in their beverage programs. These include:

- **ABaC**, Jordi Cruz's iconic three-Michelin-star restaurant.
- **Alkimia**, Jordi Vilà's Michelin-starred interpretation of contemporary Catalan cuisine.
- **Cinc Sentits**, Jordi Artal's acclaimed two-Michelin-star restaurant known for its refined vision of Catalan gastronomy.
- **Amar Barcelona**, Rafa Zafra's celebrated restaurant at the Hotel Palace.
- **Can Bo**, recognized for its commitment to outstanding ingredients and Mediterranean cuisine.

For me, it is especially meaningful that professionals at this level have found a place for Spontea on their tables. These restaurants represent gastronomic excellence, a relentless pursuit of

quality, and profound respect for ingredients—values that have guided this project from its very beginning. Their confidence gave me the encouragement to continue developing Spontea and to believe that this experience might also resonate with a broader audience.

**Many alcohol-free beverages try to imitate wine or cocktails. Would you say Spontea is intended to replace traditional wine, or to create an entirely new category?**

No—not at all. We have absolutely no intention of replacing traditional wine. In ENEO's articles, you have repeatedly shown how deeply wine is woven into Mediterranean identity—its food, rituals, and ability to adapt over time. I completely share that perspective. I have enormous respect for wine: its history, the people who make it, and everything it represents culturally. I drink it, and I love it. It would be impossible—and, frankly, unnecessary and even harmful to our way of life—to try to replace something with such a profound tradition and such an extraordinary level of refinement. What we are trying to do is create a new category, because nothing—no matter how wonderful—is appropriate for every occasion. No one replaces an evening gown, a tailored suit, a leather jacket, high heels, or sandals. Each serves a different purpose.

Spontea is born from respect for wine and for fermentation, but it does not attempt to imitate either world. It has its own identity, its own methods, and, as a result, its own distinctive sensory experience.

I think many alcohol-free beverages have tried to recreate the exact experience of wine or cocktails. But for me, the most exciting goal was to create something original—something that could sit alongside wine at the table rather than compete with it.

What I love about Spontea is that it is—or at least aspires to be—the finest example of what can be achieved through minimal intervention, exceptional craftsmanship, and thoughtful judgment when these fermentation processes are brought together. It is not a reduced, stripped-down, diminished, or suppressed version of something that was once wonderful. This may be a little controversial, but speaking only for myself, I do not want the second-best version of something I love. I would rather accept the loss and experience the very best version of something entirely different. Ultimately, the goal is to expand the possibilities for enjoyment and offer new experiences to people who want to consume alcohol more consciously without sacrificing complexity, gastronomy, or pleasure.

**In that context, what opportunities do you see for the wine industry in developing hybrid fermented beverages, especially as younger generations consume less alcohol?**

I believe the wine industry has an enormous opportunity to evolve and broaden the way we think about fermented beverages. As you pointed out in your September 2024 article, *Alcohol-Free Wine: A Category Offering Hope and the Future*, younger generations are seeking complex gastronomic experiences while reducing their alcohol consumption. I do not see this as a rejection of the social and cultural experience of wine. Rather, I see it as a redefinition of that

relationship through more conscious consumption. Wine may occupy a smaller place in that new world—but why should the grapes suffer? Why should the vineyards suffer? Let's discover what else grapes can do.

There is also a significant opportunity from the standpoint of sustainability and climate adaptation. High-quality grape must can be used to develop entirely new categories, such as Spontea, which in turn helps protect grape growers and the wine-growing economy.

Viewed from the cultural perspective, we see a changing market. Viewed from the environmental perspective, we see a changing climate. Put those two realities together, and we have both a market opportunity and a business opportunity—provided we can create a beverage that is genuinely exceptional. That is what I have spent the past ten years building and refining. There are no shortcuts. There is no substitute for taste as the guide to excellence. For me, terroir remains the ultimate expression of the land and its climate.

By working with native Spanish grape varieties such as Xarel·lo, I am not abandoning terroir. Rather, I am allowing fermentation to reinterpret it in a living, vibrant way that still honors the history of the land in its own distinctive expression through Spontea.

This is where hybrid fermented beverages can make an important contribution. The wine world already possesses something invaluable: deep knowledge of the land, fermentation, and the art of expressing identity through a product. All of that knowledge can be adapted to new forms of consumption in cooperation with Spontea. The wine industry has the grapes. Spontea brings the specialized fermentation expertise. Together, they can create something entirely new.

Spontea represents an opportunity for the wine sector to keep the Mediterranean table inclusive, vibrant, and alive.

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