



The Web Site of The Sacramento Bee

This story is taken from [Sacbee](#) / [Food & Wine/Taste](#).

Wine bars are back - and booming

By Mike Dunne - Bee Food Editor

Published 12:00 am PDT Wednesday, June 6, 2007

Their names were as noble as a label glittering with gold (Mansion Cellars, Private Reserve) and as naive as a jug of Chianti from the Tuscan hills (Fiasco!).

That was nearly a quarter of a century ago, when a booming economy and a newly confident California wine trade gave rise to the first wave of wine bars in Sacramento.

And then they were gone, and residents returned to taverns where Boodles and Bud rather than Mondavi and Mirassou were the drinks of choice. As the economy flattened, the wine bar came to be seen as frivolous, or maybe just too limited in scope to call for much repeat business.

But now the wine bar is back, showing up mostly in midtown Sacramento but also in the Sierra foothills and even out at Sacramento International Airport.

Enotria Restaurant & Wine Bar has been around for 12 years, but the other players are relatively new. Three have opened this year, and speculation abounds that three more are preparing to take root.

The United States is on the verge of becoming the world's most wine-friendly country, and the proliferation of wine bars, not at all limited to Sacramento, reflects the nation's growing confidence with and curiosity about wine, say observers of the scene.

"A whole generation has grown up with exposure to wine to one degree or another, and wants to continue that exposure," says Gary Locke, a principal in San Francisco's London Wine Bar, which opened in 1974 as the country's first.

Michael Chandler, wine director for Enotria in North Sacramento, sees the revival of the wine bar as a reflection of the public's interest in drinking more lightly and more leisurely.

"People are looking to relax, to consume more slowly, and they know that they can remember a conversation better after a glass of wine than after a martini," Chandler says.

Wine bars generally don't have plasma-screen TVs, jukeboxes or pool tables, which helps to hear conversations, and perhaps remember them.

Local wine bars vary in focus and tone, but they share the same goal -- to give guests an opportunity to taste a broad selection of wines. It's like visiting a wine region, but without having to drive from winery to winery to sample a sweep of wines.

But the trek is no less expensive. Wine tasting can be a costly night's entertainment, with 2- and 3-ounce pours generally costing around \$3 and \$4, 5- and 6-ounce pours often starting out at \$6 or \$7. And almost without exception, a glass of wine calls for something to eat, and a menu is likely to be presented with the wine list.

A tip: With an unfamiliar wine, start with a taste. The amount in the glass may seem small, but it's enough to decide whether to invest in a larger pour or a bottle.

To varying degrees, wine bars customarily try to be educational. Some offer not only wines by the glass but wines by the flight, usually three small tastes grouped by style, varietal, appellation or the like. *Vino Volo* at Sacramento International Airport has flights of "spring rosés" and "Sierra reds," while *Enotria's* slate of 10 flights includes "crisp and refreshing whites," "Spanish reds" and "bubbly."

Another teaching tool favored by some wine bars is the informed yet approachable and encouraging staff, customarily "wine geeks" themselves who love to chat about their favorite region or to share their latest discovery.

In contrast to the area's first round of wine bars, when a dozen wines seemed an astonishingly varied mix, today's wine bars customarily offer 30 to 40 wines by the glass, often hundreds more by the bottle, which also can be ordered and opened on the premises.

Today's wine bars also put more emphasis on food. In addition to the requisite assortments of olives, cheeses and cured meats, they often offer more ambitious plates -- braised brisket at *58 Degrees & Holding Co.*, potato and green-garlic soup at *Carpe Vino*, slow-roasted baby back ribs at *L Wine Lounge & Urban Kitchen*.

Which leads to the question: What's the difference between restaurant and wine bar? It's a gray area, becoming even more muddled as wine bars expand and diversify their menus and as restaurants latch on to "wine bar" as part of their name, even when their wine program isn't significantly different than what can be found at numerous trattorias, bistros and grills.

For purposes here, we consider a wine bar a wine bar when the emphasis is at least as much on wine as food, when the selection of wines is broader than what usually is found at a restaurant, and when education is part of the format, perhaps through flights, perhaps through such events as tasting seminars and winemaker presentations.

Here's an introduction to the Sacramento area's principal wine bars:

Carpe Vino

Opened: August 2002

What to expect: The most luxurious yet comfortable of the Sacramento region's wine bars, *Carpe Vino* has the welcoming look and feel of an old-time Napa Valley winery where tourists who expected to pop in for a quick taste ended up spending half the day.

Clientele: The hills are alive with the sounds of sophisticated wine talk and leftover change from the sale of Bay Area homes, both of which tend to meet on the corner of Sacramento Street and Lincoln Way in Auburn's downtown historic core.

Key to the cellar: From the start, Gary Moffat and family wanted to tailor their wine shop and tasting bar to the preferences of their patrons, who have been keen on California wines from small-production vintners who price their releases at between \$20 and \$40 a bottle, so that's what they pour primarily.

Food: The intricate New American cookery that chefs Courtney McDonald and Eric Alexander prepare on the restaurant side of *Carpe Vino* is presented with a lighter hand in the bar, where the menu runs from the simplicity of marinated olives and glazed almonds to more involved dishes such as phyllo-wrapped Camembert with a port syrup.

Try this match: Either the Mt. Vernon or the Young's barbera, both from Amador County, could have just the stuffing to go with the sweet meatiness of the bacon-wrapped Medjool dates.

Pick of the pack: The Chasing Venus sauvignon blanc from New Zealand is a personal favorite, but with summer almost here I'd be mightily tempted by the German rieslings or gewürztraminer. For a red, this is the time and place to find out whether the popular Smith Family merlot from

the Sierra foothills measures up to your standards.

Details: Open noon-10 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays for the wine bar, dinner from 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays in the restaurant; 1568 Lincoln Way, Auburn; (530) 823-0320.

Discover California

Opened: March

What to expect: Sacramento's only wine bar to replicate a wine cellar, Discover California occupies historic subterranean quarters that once housed Hogshead Brew Pub, in effect mimicking the country's shift from beer to wine.

Clientele: Given that Discover California is in Old Sacramento, most of its patrons are tourists, though owner Vickie Allen says more local residents are discovering the place.

Key to the cellar: As the name suggests, this is the place to discover California wines, which is all it stocks, most of which are from Northern California. Expect to find between 30 and 40 wines poured by the taste (3 ounces) and the glass (6 ounces). Flights of three wines (2 ounces each) also are available.

Food: Small plates of assertively seasoned foods -- grilled portobello mushrooms topped with a mustard sauce; brie and a raspberry filling in puff pastry -- call for equally vigorous wines.

Try this match: St. Amant Vineyards of Lodi long has been recognized for its ports, so order a glass of the 2002 Bootleg Port and pair it with the chocolate truffles.

Pick of the pack: If you've never been to Old Sacramento, the Bogle pinot noir will get you there, despite the parking challenges.

Details: Open 11 a.m.- 9 p.m. daily; 114 J St., Old Sacramento; (916) 443-8275.

Enotria Restaurant & Wine Bar

Opened: Fall 1995, as Enotria Cafe & Wine Bar

What to expect: The oldest and most energetic of the Sacramento area's wine bars, Enotria draws its clientele largely for its varied program of tastings, its numerous imaginative flights, its extensive list of wines by the glass and its inventory of nearly 1,000 wines by the bottle.

Clientele: Hard-core wine enthusiasts who want to continue their education in encouraging surroundings form the backbone of Enotria's clientele, with many of the regulars drawn from the nearby Woodlake neighborhood.

Key to the cellar: Enotria wine director Michael Chandler has assembled one of the more eclectic and comprehensive cellars in the region, with no appellation or style ignored. In constantly shaking up his selections of wine by the glass, Chandler draws from a list deep with popular varietals (Australian shiraz, Russian River Valley pinot noir) while being eager to embrace the largely undiscovered (German whites, Portuguese reds).

Food: The same modern Mediterranean and California menu that serves the restaurant serves the bar. Appetizers especially suitable for snacking on while exploring wine include a selection of artisan cheeses, crab cakes, and toast with warm goat cheese, sun-dried tomatoes and a roasted-garlic syrup.

Try this match: Gosset's "Excellence" Champagne with the ahi tartar, pickled ginger and wasabi rice has become the wine bar's signature pairing.

Pick of the pack: Silly name, simple label, but the Kung Fu Girl 2006 Washington Riesling is a

first-rate off-dry take on this refreshing varietal.

Details: Regular hours are 5-9 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 5-10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, plus numerous special events, such as a themed tasting 5-6:30 p.m. each Friday; 1431 Del Paso Blvd. (at Arden Way), Sacramento; (916) 922-6792.

58 Degrees & Holding Co.

Opened: May 2006

What to expect: A former furniture showroom, 58 Degrees is the busiest, brightest and most diversified of Sacramento's wine bars, with climate-controlled lockers, a private party room, seating inside and out, and a wine shop.

Clientele: Demographics are all over the board, with a slight nod to the young professional female.

Key to the cellar: 58 Degree's eclectic selection of wines is for the open-minded and adventurous, with Australia, Austria and Spain sharing the racks with both mainstream and cult releases from California.

Food: Under the direction of executive chef David Feldman, 58 Degrees has been expanding its Mediterranean menu and, in addition to such wine-bar staples as bruschetta and charcuterie, now includes a three-course prix-fixe menu, with paired wines (\$50) or without (\$35).

Try this match: Order the crostini topped with melted brie, served with thin slices of mellow pink salami, and then a glass of one of the bar's meatier pinot noirs.

Pick of the pack: A flute of Schramsberg's blanc de noirs will start off the night festively, while one of the Smith Woodhouse ports will end it with a warm hug.

Details: Open daily, 11 a.m.-1 a.m. Thursdays through Saturdays, 11 a.m.-11 p.m. other days; 1217 18th St., Sacramento; (916) 442-5858.

The Grand

Opened: February 2007

What to expect: The most idiosyncratic of the city's wine bars, The Grand occupies a tiny corner of a parking garage where patrons originally were to pay before retrieving their cars. With more seating outside than in, and little food, The Grand doesn't encourage loitering, but serves more as the gathering point for the start of the night's midtown crawl.

Clientele: Suits from the nearby Capitol have discovered The Grand, but the makeup of the crowd -- and any size party at The Grand is a crowd -- is apt to shift with the opening of a nearby high-rise hotel.

Key to the cellar: The Grand's boldly international wine list is for the person willing to seize a glass of the unfamiliar, regardless of whether he can pronounce the name of the wine. Just a handful of domestic wines are on the list, with most of the choices from Italy, Spain, France, Germany and elsewhere.

Food: Without a kitchen, The Grand's food options are limited to a few snacks from its sister restaurant just up L Street, Aioli Bodega Española. The selection changes periodically, and lately has included a cheese plate, crostini and pâté.

Try this match: The forthright pesto crostini and a taste of the frolicsome Uvaggio 2006 Lodi Vermentino, which has the spine and fruit to stand up to the essence of basil and olive oil.

Pick of the pack: The Domaine de Paul Autard 2005 Cotes-du-Rhône is a youthful and delicately spicy introduction to the varietal, but next time I'm reverting to the steady San Leonino 2004 Chianti Classico.

Details: Flexible hours, but lately mid-day to midnight Mondays through Fridays, 4 p.m.-midnight Saturdays; 16th and L streets, Sacramento; (916) 444-0472.

L Wine Lounge and Urban Kitchen

Opened: April

What to expect: Conceived on the premise that people want small plates of food every bit as varied and interesting as the wine, L is concentrating on the pairing of both, right down to a central community table where tasters previously unknown to each other can swap insights.

Clientele: Still in its infancy, with an unfinished air about its sleek and hard lines, L looks to be drawing mostly the curious, many of them midtown professionals, but others are showing up from the suburbs.

Key to the cellar: The wine list is manageable but wildly diverse, with an emphasis primarily on precious releases from international and domestic producers who may be obscure to the general public but nevertheless tend to be cherished by collectors.

Food: The dear tends to stand out on chef Ame Harrington's menu -- French lentil mireproix, pommes Anna, gnudi -- but the compact selection also is as earthy as flatiron steak, baby back ribs and a burger.

Try this match: The cured meats, especially the intense salami, with the voluptuous C.G. Di Arie 2005 Shenandoah Valley Primitivo.

Pick of the pack: Spring's flowers may be fading, but their color and scent are as vivid as ever in the complex, spicy and long Clos Saron 2006 Oregon House "Carte Blanche," a white blend.

Details: Food and wine both available 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 a.m.-midnight Thursdays through Saturdays; 1801 L St., Sacramento; (916) 443-6970.

Vino Volo

Opened: December 2006

What to expect: To get to Vino Volo from the terminal entrance, you need to have a boarding pass for an outbound flight. Vino Volo is the only wine bar in the area where you first must slip off shoes and belt, where you find the knife made of plastic instead of metal, and where the most astute nose belongs to the dog sniffing for bombs as he makes his rounds of Sacramento International Airport. A few paces off the main concourse of Terminal A, Vino Volo is a gate of tranquility and relaxation amid the rush and stress of the airport. The music is soothing, the servers chatty, the furnishings comfortable and fashionable.

Clientele: About evenly divided between men and women, Vino Volo is drawing patrons who have arrived early for their flight or been stranded by a cancellation, as well as some who just have flown in and realized they don't have a gift for the uncle they are about to visit.

Key to the cellar: California is the focus, including a section of the tasting menu devoted to wines of the nearby Sierra foothills, but France, Italy and New Zealand also are represented in a continually revolving inventory totaling around 40 labels.

Food: Brief menu, catered by The Supper Club in North Sacramento, lately has included skewers of New York strip steak, smoked-salmon rolls and duck confit, as well as the obligatory artisan cheeses and cured meats.

Try this match: Want to know why cheese and sauvignon blanc often work so well together? Order the cheese plate and a glass of the grassy and minerally Daniel Chotard 2005 Loire Valley Sancerre.

Pick of the pack: For \$25, you can get small tastes of both the Caymus Vineyards 2004 Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon (\$135 per bottle) and the Chateau Lynch Bages 2003 (\$85).

Details: Open daily, 9 a.m.-10 p.m.; second floor, Terminal A, Sacramento International Airport; (916) 929-8466.

Go to: [Sacbee](#) / [Back to story](#)

This article is protected by copyright and should not be printed or distributed for anything except personal use.
The Sacramento Bee, 2100 Q St., P.O. Box 15779, Sacramento, CA 95852
Phone: (916) 321-1000

[Copyright](#) © [The Sacramento Bee](#)