



RORY SHERIDAN POURS A ROSÉ AT OTTIMISTA.

# Taste of the Good Life

HOW DO YOU APPROACH A WINE BAR? WITH AN OPEN MIND. GET THE BEST OF THE CITY'S FRESHEST CROP. BY JORDAN MACKAY

**M**eeting for a drink no longer automatically implies a cocktail or a pint—these days, it's just as likely to be a glass of Cab. Between the old favorites (such as Hôtel Biron off Market Street and Bacchus in Russian Hill) and newcomers such as Vino Rosso, which just opened in Bernal Heights, wine bars are becoming standard. For those used to the comfort of a G&T or an Anchor Steam, selecting from a list of unfamiliar bottles—divided by countries, regions within countries, appellations or grape varietals—can be intimidating. So, order by the glass; tasting is believing. Then settle into the relaxed atmosphere, resting assured that the bartender isn't going to have to grab someone by the scruff and say, "You've had enough Tocai Friulano, Charlie. Time to go home." x

## CAV

If you're looking for esoteric gems, come to this wine bar-cum-restaurant. Former Hayes and Vine owner Pamela Busch and Tadd Cortell, formerly of the Public, make the most of this narrow, chic space. Flag down Busch to help you navigate a list that can be dizzying in its unfamiliar selections. Flights—tastings of a few related types of wine—change week to week and offer under-the-radar Bordeaux as well as an international array of Sauvignon Blancs. The fantastic food here is the best secret in town, but if you just want wine and a snack, avoid peak dining hours. **1666 MARKET ST., 415-437-1770**

## THE HIDDEN VINE

For a back-alley, underground place that's open until 2 a.m. on the weekends, the Hidden Vine

has a surprisingly stately feel. The plush couches and candlelit ambiance encourage a lengthy visit. The domestic selections are not to be missed: How wonderful to find such wines as the Kathryn Kennedy Lateral and the Chappellet Chenin Blanc available by the glass. With only two bottles over \$100, the prices are refreshingly low. **1/2 COSMO PL., 415-674-3567**

## OTTIMISTA ENOTECA CAFÉ

Every neighborhood should have a true Italian-style enoteca like this: You can order an espresso as early as 11 a.m. and a glass of Montepulciano at 1 a.m. The wine list is mostly Italian—in fact, this is one of the best Italian collections in the city, including, on one of my visits, 18 choices from the often-overlooked Trentino-Alto Adige region, as well as six selections

of Barbera, an underrated grape. Outdoor seating and a well-priced food menu make for the perfect way to while away an afternoon drinking the Lagrein rosé from Cantina Terlano. **1838 UNION ST., 415-674-8400**

## QUE SYRAH

Neighbors in West Portal duck out of the fog to warm up on one of the love seats at this 25-seat wine bar, opened a few months ago by 30-something couple Stephanie and Keith McCardell. Flights are offered, as well as about 20 wines by the glass, with an assortment that tends toward small-production selections such as Shypoke Charbono from the Napa Valley. Cheese plates are served too. **230 WEST PORTAL AVE., 415-731-7000**

## WINE BAR AND SHOP

Owner Mark Dirsas—who also has some history with Hayes and Vine (he bought it after Cav's Pamela Busch sold it)—relocated much of the former Hayes Valley spot, from the tables to the marble bar, to this downtown ground-level shopping-center space. It functions as a wine shop too, but you're here for the 45 wines by the glass. The weekly menu includes such low-production wines as Etude from Napa and Gaya from Italy. **2 EMBARCADERO CTR., 415-391-0758**