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Grape Escape

This über-lounge gives 'room with a view' new meaning

Tucked away down a tiny alleyway, Tastings Wine Bar is an exclusive new hideout across the road from the Kee Club in Central. It features 40 revolving wines from a list of 196, and uses an advanced bottling system so that you sample or savour a selection of different wines, accompanied by premium canapés and cheeses and cool background music.

The creative brains behind the cool, welcoming bar is its director Charlene Dawes, who wanted to make wine drinking fun and informative without the seriousness of a formal tasting course. "After I saw these new tasting machines, I thought, 'I should open a place that's enjoyable and a great way for people to try many different wines from around the world,'" she says. Dawes, a graduate of the rigorous WSET wine course, has installed an Enomatic system to ensure a

perfect pour every time with no exposure to outside air – the machine vacuum-seals the wine and dispenses exactly how much you want, in this case a small tasting of 25cl, medium 75cl or generous full glass of 150cl, one of the only systems of its kind in the city.

Of course, if you find something you fancy they have plenty in stock for a bottle or three to keep the evening rolling. "This is different than any other wine bar in town. We change our wines every month to bring unusual and unique wines from different regions and countries, where customers can judge for themselves what they like and learn about wines in an unpretentious way." And Dawes is always on hand to advise on the special characteristics of each wine she personally selects for the bar's cellar.

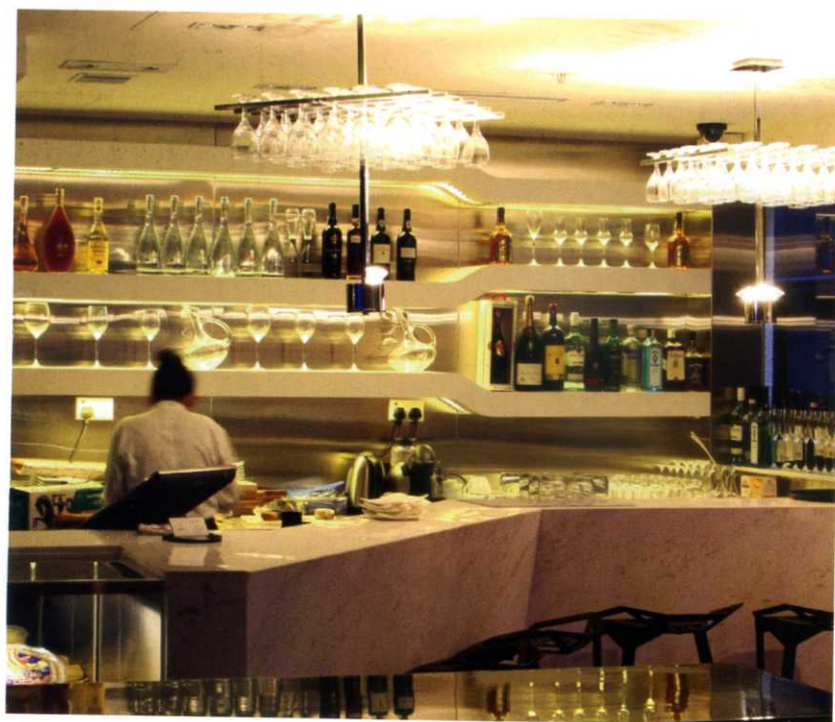
Drawing on the creative and artistic input of Artichaut Limited's Eva Leung, Dawes had a vision of an environment far removed from a dark, stuffy bar and created cleverly positioned focused lighting amid softly illuminated surfaces so you can see the colors of what you're drinking. "It's a modern

take on a traditional wine cellar using elements of wood and stone, with the Italian cloud lamp adding a touch of fantasy to the overall feel."

Naturally the only thing to pair with fine wine is fine food such as French cheese and European ham platters, freshly made dips and warm bruschetta with plans for desserts and chocolates to match with dessert wines. If you have a particular delicacy you would like to pair with your wines such as premium caviar, truffles or Belgian chocolates just let the staff know ahead of time and they will be happy to source whatever you fancy for large groups. ■

5 Tasting Tips

- 1. See it** – always start with perfectly clear, white wines, which gain color as they age. Reds lose it; older vintage reds usually have a brownish hint around the rim
- 2. Swirl it** – holding your glass by the stem, swirl in one direction so aeration can help the wine 'breathe' and release aromas and alcohol vapors
- 3. Smell it** – As you get better you will be able to tell what kind of wine it is by the 'notes' of fruits, smokiness, earth/leaves, herbs like vanilla and other characteristics to narrow the choice – Cabernet, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Burgundy – even the country. Experts go on to region, vineyard, even exact year of bottling.
- 4. Sip it** – Just a bit, let it move around your mouth. Sweet/sour/acidic/fruit-forward/tannin-heavy/light-medium-full-bodied?
- 5. Swallow it** – one of the joys of Tastings is that you are not an official judge at a contest, so enjoy. A sip or water or bite of food will re-adjust your palate as you move from lighter to heavier, white to red



Tastings Wine Bar

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