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## Learning wine at Local Vine

By Geoff Carter



Speaking purely from a design standpoint, The Local Vine has one of the most original menus I've ever seen. A cardboard envelope holds two handsomely printed, folded sheets -- one lists wines, the other small plates. A legend on the front of the envelope explains how to read the menu: Items marked with a heart symbolize "wine we love," a pine tree indicates "local wine," the Venus symbol denotes "female winemaker(s)" and so on. If you don't know how to read the menu, your server is more than happy to explain it -- and the workings of Local Vine -- in exact detail.

In other words, if Local Vine sounds less like a wine bar and more like a school, you're not far off. This new Belltown bar -- located at Second and Vine, naturally -- caters to those who haven't yet gotten the hang of the whole wine-appreciation thing. The whites and reds are grouped together by their dominant attributes: "Succulent," "Earthy," "Lush," "Boisterous," etc. Subheads clarify meaning ("Centered: Crisp, balanced, racy acidity"), and the aforementioned symbols provide further clarification where it's needed or deserved. (And if you're still not sure about that cabernet or pinot gris, your server will help to narrow down your choices still further -- and they won't sigh or roll their eyes when you mispronounce "viognier." I, um, know this guy.)

This pedantic approach will please wine novices, but it may annoy enthusiasts or those who don't like their server to hover over them, even when he or she is doling out useful advice. In that case, you may want to select your wine before the server approaches your table. Even if you know jack about wine, the menu's instructions do make it easy to choose, and the wine lovers in my party largely agreed that the Local Vine's wine list is exceptional. (One of my friends, borrowing a line from a local strip club, puckishly summarized Local Vine's list: "Hundreds of good wines and three ugly ones.")

Don't forget to order a few small plates from the kitchen. Pretty much everything on the menu, from the tender gnocchi with corn dressing to the tangy, citrus-marinated beet salad, is well worth trying. (The plates are easily paired with beverages: The food menu comes with instructions as well). And the cheese plates, many of which originate in Europe, are every bit as rewarding to the palate as the wine in your glass.

The only regard in which Local Vine stumbles is in the design of the dining area. While it's very fine to look at -- I particularly love the boxy, glass-encased modernist fireplace, with its gas flames erupting from toasterlike slits in metal plates -- it's a little too hip, too self-aware. However, the polished concrete floors and floor-to-ceiling wine rack are attractive touches, and the Eames-style chairs and barstools are more comfortable than they look. You may enjoy camping out in one of those chairs for a while, if you're not bothered by the idea of a menu that purports to know more than you do.