

the Stranger

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LOOKING FOR
TROUBLE
PAUL CONSTANT
TOURS MAYOR NICKELS'S
'PROBLEM CLANS'
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BAR EXAM

Mission Control

by Bethany Jean Clement

The Enomatic Wine Preservation System is a **thing of beauty**, a bank of wine bottles each standing on an individual cylindrical silver platform, raised up like a statuette. The machine—it's Italian—is über-sleek, with three small red lights



glowing above each bottle. These lights indicate invisible buttons that, when pushed, produce one-ounce, two-ounce, or five-ounce pours through

tiny, automatically self-cleaning metal straws. The Enomatic preserves opened wine via the infusion of nitrogen gas for up to 45 days. It's a major advance for by-the-glass service, and **it looks like the future**, the way wine would be dispensed on a really good spaceship.

The Local Vine, Belltown's newest wine bar, possesses the first Enomatic in the state and one of the first 100 in the USA. (Enomatics may also be found at Vino Venue in San Francisco and Tastings: A Wine Experience, a Florida chain, among other venues/experiences.) The observant might note the presence—in a refrigerator case directly beneath the expensive bottles of wine on the silvery pedestals of the Enomatic—of bottles of cold Pabst Blue Ribbon. Does the Local Vine expect to sell a lot of PBR? No, it's just the beer that co-owner Sarah Munson likes best, the one she drinks when her palate is exhausted from all the fine wines.

Much has been made of the fact that Munson and her partner Allison Nelson are Harvard MBAs, and part of the Local Vine mission is to open an unspecified number of additional wine bars throughout the Pacific Northwest over the next three to five years. The place feels eminently reproducible, already familiar: retail element in the entry, contemporary lines, molded plastic barstools, swoopy mod ceiling made out of tasteful wood slats, hanging globe light fixtures, fireplace feature. (The fire makes perfect sense visually, with its pretty emanations of denatured ethanol flame partially encased in glass; the seating all around, however, raises the specter of someone exceptionally stupid and/or drunk leaning back on the burning hot glass, which would be a really bad scene.)

The Local Vine's tagline is "your neighborhood wine bar"; its mission also involves jettisoning the exclusivity surrounding wine. "Call us crazy, but we think it's doable," says the wine list, which is rife with demystifying icons (designating the likes of "local wine," "cult wine," "wine we love") and friendly adjectival categories (e.g., "succulent," "statuesque," "boisterous" whites; "cheerful," "engaging," "lush" reds). Call them crazy, and scoot over, or else they're going to sit on your lap! The list includes small producers both local and global, "People whose wines tell a story...."

For the food, Munson and Nelson made a very smart move, bringing in chef Jason Wilson of Crush to create a local, organic, seasonal menu of small plates (also listed by adjective, with suggested pairings from the wine adjective lists). If all goes according to the business plan, it'll be a key component of the Local Vine formula for success, as well as delicious. ■

The Local Vine, 2520 Second Ave, 441-6000.