

A Tale of Two Wine Bars

Sipping wine in the heart of the Willamette Valley just got better with these two hip hot spots.

BY KERRY NEWBERRY

HORSE RADISH WINE & CHEESE BAR

"Fermentation," he announces deeply into the microphone, followed by a few notes from his piano keyboard. It's spoken word with harvest lingo. A few more piano taps, and he leans forward to say, "Welcome to Carlton, Oregon, the heart of wine country. You have lots of choices," folk singer Randy Byrnes muses, "You can be in a lot of different places, and here you are."

Sipping a mimosa splashed with Argyle bubbly, on a sunny Sunday in October, this seems an ideal place to be.



Sabra Mathot, owner of The Horse Radish Wine & Cheese Bar, toasts with Davin McNeal, the wine bar's "wine guy."

PHOTO BY TOM BALLARD

The Horse Radish Wine & Cheese Bar sits in the center of Carlton, with large picture windows framing the heart of West Main Street: local kids riding bikes, Harley riders duded up in leather and rubber boot-clad winemakers transporting truckloads of grapes.

It's a bigger vision than owner Sabra Mathot had in mind when she set out to open a cheese shop. Her response, "What the heck, you only live once." And she's enjoying this venture thoroughly.

After a Belgian marriage and decades of relishing cheese across Europe, her mantra for fine dining followed, "Go for the after-dinner cheese course, and forget the dessert!"

This cheese lover turned connoisseur when she decided to share her passion with others and scouted areas to open a shop. The one place she kept returning to is the ample space the Horse Radish now fills on West Main.

A gourmand's delight graces the front corner with neatly stacked rows of specialty goods to get the taste buds watering: local honey and jams, olive oils

and vinegars, myriad mustards, olive tapenades, cured meats and Red Fox Bakery French loaves to name a few. This is the place to pick up your provisions before or after a day of tasting in wine country.

Near the cheese counter, sinfully good Honest Chocolates from McMinnville are a must. Handmade, decadent nuggets crafted to pair with wine include: Blueberry Pinot Ganache (indulge with a local Pinot Noir) or a Currant Claret Ganache (savor and sigh with a Syrah).

Next, an affair with cheese—and there are over 50 to choose from. When asked for a favorite, Mathot paused, "Oh, that's tough," and like a true cheese devotee, declined to choose, saying, "there are just too many good ones."

Opt for a platter: the North by Northwest Plate: MitiCana, Willamette Valley Cheese Company Gouda and Rogue Creamery Chocolate Stout Cheddar; or the Wine Steward's Plate: Willamette Valley Wine Rubbed Gouda, Vella Dry Jack and Ferns Edge Pear & Anise Chevre. For meat lovers, add a paté from the artisan Viande Meats & Sausage.

Cheese and charcuterie in hand, the next stop is the bar for a splash, glass or bottle of wine. Glass pours are whimsical and vary each day. Davin McNeal, the "wine guy" will narrate the tales behind the boutique bottles stacked neatly by the bar on wooden racks.

Beyond the fine cheese, wine and musical flair, Mathot also showcases local art, ranging from landscape photography to large Jackson Pollock-like paintings. And then there's the art you sit on—Wine Country Woodcraft from local artisan Robert Smiley.

Intricately designed pieces include a boomerang-shaped bistro table with a base of three wine barrels and the back bar, a fantastic construction from barrel



Jessica More, owner of Crush Wine Lounge & Bistro.

PHOTO BY MARCUS LARSON

tops and staves. Plus, one elegant Adirondack chair, a barrel on a new adventure, lounges by the exposed brick wall and beckons, recline. And you should.

The Horse Radish Cheese & Wine Bar, located at 211 W. Main Street in downtown Carlton, is open Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Friday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 7 p.m. For more information, please call 503-852-6656, or visit www.thehorseradish.com.

CRUSH WINE LOUNGE & BISTRO

Crush, harvest time in wine country, is a feast for the senses. Glistening Pinot Noir clusters shower from bins for sorting, then a deep, dark swirl of purple cascades into vats, filling wineries with the intoxicating aroma of fermenting grapes.

A similar sensation envelops imbibers at first step into the alluring new Crush Wine Lounge & Bistro in downtown Newberg.

Stepping through the doors of the storied Victorian house, avant-garde décor unfolds with a thick and luscious Merlot-colored carpet framed by midnight black doors and ceilings. An elegant foyer accentuated by a gleaming chandelier, glowing scarlet lamps with black flapper fringe and plush couches sing of speakeasy days.

In the adjacent room, a sparkling black chandelier stars, along with a clustering of tall-backed velour chairs in mustard gold, vintage cocktail tables and a splash of leopard print on a lampshade. It's a room with '70s flair, yet also feels like F. Scott Fitzgerald's debonair character, Jay Gatsby could be found reclining, a glass of Pinot in hand.

Add in the 1920s tunes played throughout the lounge and the vintage black dresses servers sashay by in (there is a closet full to choose from), and a visit to Crush feels both urbane and retro.

Jessica More, owner of Crush, likens the spirit of the place to a bottle of wine. "At the end of a long day, when it's time to wind down—I open a bottle of Pinot Noir, hear the cork pop off, take that

first sip and it goes through your body and just relaxes you... I think that has been created," she says.

The wine list, a beautifully fashioned book, highlights boutique producers throughout Oregon. "There are so many fabulous, small winemakers that people don't know about," More says. She sees this list as a venue for small producers to shine.

Each bottle selection receives one luminous page in the book with the label artfully transposed, winemaker tasting notes and winery facts. From the glass pours (15 in total), a white to try: the 2004 Adea Reserve Chardonnay, a splash of tropical across the palate (\$10); for a rainy evening red, the 2005 Sharecropper's Cabernet Sauvignon (\$10) smooth and full bodied. For a late night sweet sip, taste the 2006 Capitello Dolcino (\$10), an ice wine made from Gewürztraminer.

To complement the wines, Chef Michael Rooney crafts winery plates, small plates and sweet plates. Toast to autumn with the wine country antipasto: wine-cured dry salami, sopressata, roasted pepper and wild mushroom tartlets (\$10). For a taste of the Pacific Northwest, the salmon tataki, wild Chinook salmon with a sweet soy glaze and crispy won tons (\$9) or for a heartier plate, the beef roulades in Burgundy, pan-seared angus beef rolled in shallot, bacon and mushroom filling, cooked in Burgundy sauce (\$11).

If cocktail is more your style, the last room beckons with a glistening burgundy bar, a rounded crescent moon glowing in candlelight. It's a house awakened, set to sip, savor and unwind on the road from wine country.

Crush Wine Lounge & Bistro, located at 115 N. Washington Street in Newberg, is open Wednesday and Thursday from 4 to 9 p.m., and Friday and Saturday from 4 to 10 p.m. For more information, please call 503-538-5113, or visit the website www.crushwinelounge.com.

Kerry Newberry is a Pinot-sipping, vineyard-hopping food and wine writer in Portland.