



COURTESY PHOTO

Seasons 52 grill and wine bar in Rockville offers 60 wines by the glass.

Discovering wines by the glass

My “job” is a lot of fun — and a lot of work (although no one ever believes me). I get to taste countless wines each year to figure out which ones offer the biggest bang for the buck. While I have to kiss a lot of toads to find the princesses, in the long run, it’s worth it.

However, not everyone has the luxury of opening bottle after bottle of wine in the name of research. Enter the new breed of wine bar.

For the last decade or so, many wine-centric restaurants and shops in the D.C. area have started offering tastes of wines so consumers can hone their palates without having to purchase an entire bottle. And the best part is that someone, usually a sommelier or wine buyer, has already narrowed the field down. All you have to do is let your palate enjoy the ride.

Here is a summary of some of the top spots in our area to taste a variety of varietals. Prices are approximate.

Northern Virginia

Wine from a vending machine? At **Evo Bistro** in McLean, restaurant patrons can purchase a debit card and use it to help themselves from a list of more than 50 wines. Guests insert their card, select a wine, and receive a one-ounce, three-ounce or five-ounce pour.

EatBar in Arlington has one of the most eclectic wine-by-the-glass programs in the area. With more than 50 wines available in three-, six- and 10-ounce pours (\$4 to \$25), the list will keep any palate busy for many visits.

Vinifera Wine Bar & Bistro in the Westin Hotel in Reston is named after the grape species that most wines are made from. The wine menu boasts more than 30 wines by the glass served from a special Cruvinet system that keeps the wines fresh and at the perfect temperature.

Maryland

Grapeseed in Bethesda was one of the first restaurants to bravely go where no restaurant had gone before — offering high-end wines by the glass, where the liquor laws are a bit quirky. But chef/owner Jeff Heineman persevered and now offers more than 25 whites and 25 reds and a variety of sparkling and dessert wines either by the glass or sample pour (\$5 to \$20).

The Wine Harvest, with two locations in Montgomery County (Kentlands in Gaithersburg and Park Potomac) is a specialty wine shop that offers sandwiches and light snacks along with samples of wines by the glass (\$4 to \$9).

Florida-based **Seasons 52’s** newest outpost landed in the Rockville area, and offers guests up to 60 different wines by the glass (six-ounce pours ranging from \$6 to \$15).

District

Mark Culler has been collecting wine for more than 25 years, so when he debuted **Proof**, wine was a major focus. He purchased a state-of-the-art wine storage system that serves 16 white wines and 16 red wines. The temperature-controlled system uses gas to keep the bottles fresh for up to three weeks, but they rarely last more than a day or two. In addition to the two-, six- or 8.5-ounce pours of reds and whites (ranging from \$7 to \$22 per glass), there are eight sparkling wines and eight dessert wines available.

If you’re looking to see the world through wine, then take the tour at **Cork Wine Bar** near Logan Circle. Cork offers more than 50 wines by the glass, from big and small producers from around the world, and prides itself on making wine-tasting approachable by providing easy-to-understand descriptions of each wine. In addition, Cork offers flights of wine so you can sample different regions and varietals. No passport necessary.

De Pue taking a culinary gamble

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

For boldly establishing fine dining along the H Street Corridor, Frederik De Pue deserves some kudos. As executive chef of the recently opened Smith Commons, De Pue is something of a betting man, for he is gambling that this strip of commerce will gentrify into D.C.’s newest, best-food part of town.

“I like challenges,” he says. “I never take the easy road. H Street is an up-and-coming neighborhood.”

To show that he means this, De Pue has opened a restaurant that exudes the same kind of upscale charm you might find in Penn Quarter or even Georgetown. But that he has set his sights on this Northeast location should surprise no one who knows this Belgian native, whose reputation as a culinary trendsetter seems firmly established.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, De Pue did not know from early childhood that his dream job should be cooking. “I asked Dad what I should do,” he says. “I had always done some work in the kitchen, and I decided that going to chef’s school is what I wanted to do with life. Cooking was my dad’s passion, so we went back and forth. ... He said he would send me to the best culinary school in Belgium, and if I didn’t like it, I should move on.”

As it turned out, he trained at



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Frederik De Pue describes his cooking style as “modern bistro.”

the Hotelschool Ter Duinen before moving to France, where he had the great good fortune to work at several premier restaurants, including under famed Alain Ducasse at Le Louis XV. When he was only 21, he worked at Yves Mattagne’s Sea Grill in Brussels for several years before moving to Washington to work as the executive chef for the ambassador of the European Com-

IF YOU GO

Smith Commons

» **Where:** 1245 H St. NE
» **Info:** 202-396-0038
» **Hours:** Dinner: 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. Monday to Thursday, 5 p.m. to 3 a.m. Friday and Saturday, 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday

mission delegation.

De Pue classifies his cooking style as “modern bistro,” citing as an example the veal porterhouse or the pork chop seasoned with mace. “This is really a modern take on the bistro,” he says.

With a mini-library of cookbooks that he never refers to — “I have not opened a cookbook in five years,” he says — De Pue says he picks up recipe ideas every day from everywhere, particularly from Belgium. “I go back at least one time a year,” he says. “These last six months, I’ve been back three times. ... I get a lot of ideas because I eat out a lot.”

But as it turns out, De Pue eats out a lot here, and will even travel to Philadelphia or New York City for dinner. “I like high-end restaurants, the whole experience,” he says. And when he stays in town for dinner? He lists the following as among his favorites: Central, Blue Duck Tavern, BlackSalt and Equinox.

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WASHINGTON

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