

“Since this is a beach town you get an influx of tourists in the summer and early fall,” Lee explains. “Permanent residents support me too, though. We serve all age groups, from 21 to 90.” She takes pride in what she calls, “my quaint little wine bar” and rightfully so. It’s a delight. Vino Manzanita is open from 5 to 10 p.m. six nights a week and closed Sunday. After Labor Day, it’ll be closed Sunday and Monday. For more information, visit Vino’s Facebook page.

The Wine Bar at Sweet Basil’s Café

Marcie Russo has been with Sweet Basil’s Café and its wine bar for the last two years, bringing with her a strong background in wine. “When I popped in here looking for work, John (Sowa) saw my resume and exclaimed ‘Oh, this is a good fit for here!’” The restaurant’s previous wine buyer left just a couple of weeks after Russo arrived, and the job was hers.

Her love of wine is positively infectious. “The thing people don’t know about wine bars is that when you come in for a bottle, you get a wine bar price,” Russo explains. “People often don’t know that and they should. It’s usually about three times the glass price instead of four times — there’s a bit of a discount. It’s not a wine shop price; it’s not a restaurant price; it’s somewhere in between.”

Owner John Sowa had the wine bar built in 2009. There, patrons can purchase wine flights to compare and contrast Northwest wines with other varietals from around the world. For \$12 they get five 2-ounce pours; for \$15 they get eight 2-ounce pours. Flights are on offer from 4 to 6 p.m. and as time permits throughout the day.

Small plates, including tapas, provide the perfect accompaniment. But if they don’t fill the bill, items on the full restaurant menu may be ordered as well. There’s also live music five nights a week — Wednesday through Sunday. Explains Sowa, “I came from New Orleans where music and food were always a combination.”

Despite all the activity — the restaurant, the wine bar and live music — 10 p.m. is closing time, even on the weekends. “The crowd here is older, between 45 and 75,” Sowa says by way of explanation. “It’s not a late night place. To a degree this changes in the off season. Locals will come in for the music and a glass of wine. They don’t come downtown during the summer.”

As you’d expect, a lot of thought goes into the wines served — many of them Northwest wines — with what’s left comprising only about 10 percent of the entire stock. There’s also as many reds as whites.

Instead of doing pairings, staff offer suggestions. “Paired wine takes away from the variety, which I don’t like,” says Sowa. “I’d rather see an on-the-spot suggestion.” This method works rather well given that “What wine do you think we should drink with this?” is a frequently asked question. So, while spicy foods like jambalaya may go best with a sweeter wine — like a sweet riesling — a server here wouldn’t suggest such a pairing outright. He or she would ask diners what they liked and then try and find something in between.

Obviously, there’s a lot to know about wine, but think of the fun you’ll have along the way! Says Russo, “On the West Coast, we’re just more casual about wine. The scene here isn’t like New York’s and they, in turn, are looking to Paris. Still, the fact remains that Oregon, Washington and California are on the cutting edge in the wine world. We shouldn’t take it for granted that we are in the most superior triangle for certain kinds of wine: Oregon pinot noirs, best in the world; Washington syrahs, best in the world; California cabernets and chardonnays, best in the world.”



WineKraft in Astoria, co-owned by Rebecca Kraft, right, and April Thorgramson, offers a spectacular view of the Astoria Riverwalk and Columbia River.



Left: At The Wine Bar at Sweet Basil’s Cafe in Cannon Beach, patrons can try wine flights of five or eight pours.

Below: Sweet Basil’s Cafe’s wine bar was added to the Cannon Beach restaurant in 2009.



A red wine at The Wine Bar at Sweet Basil’s Cafe in Cannon Beach.