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FEATURED

Wine bars making a splash on the North Shore

By Ethan Forman Staff Writer Feb 10, 2019



Ethan Forman/Staff photo Tartine Kitchen & Eatery recently opened a wine bar where patrons can sip wine and look out over Cabot Street in downtown Beverly.



PEABODY — Wine bars feature wine not as a complement to a meal, but as the main attraction, and they are starting to pop up on the North Shore.

Just as cafes feature coffee, and breweries feature craft brews, wine bars are all about serving wine by the glass or bottle. Owners say wine bars are designed to create a relaxed, social atmosphere where you can sip a glass and have a bite from a small plate without feeling hurried to order a big meal.

They are popular in Boston. Salem residents familiar with the original location of Jaho Coffee & Tea on Derby Street may know of the flagship Jaho Coffee Roaster and Wine Bar in Boston.

In November, Theory Wine Bar and Listening Room opened at 10 Main St. in Andover, featuring organic wines sourced from sustainable agriculture and live Jazz played by local musicians.

Closer to home, Tartine Kitchen & Eatery at 192 Cabot St. in downtown Beverly has opened a wine bar in its newly expanded location.

Recently, Stella's Restaurant and Wine Bar opened at the former location of Smokin' Betty's and Red Lulu at 94 Lafayette St. in Salem.

Stella's

Peter Mikedis, the owner of Stella's, says he has one of the largest selections of wines on the North Shore and Cape Ann.

"Right now, we have over 190 varieties of wine," Mikedis said. "And we have something for everyone."

Toward the back of the restaurant, Mikedis has installed a large wine cellar lit by LED lights. The wines come from California, Oregon, France, Australia, Spain, Italy and Greece.

And you don't have to order a whole bottle to get a good glass of wine. Stella's offers 35 wines by the glass, starting at \$8.

While such a large variety can be daunting, Mikedis said he and his manager have tried most of the collection and are there to help: "That's why when I say 'we have something for everyone,' even if you are not well aware of wines.

Stella's is starting a "Coravin list," named after a wine preservation system that Mikedis said can tap the bottle without removing the cork, replacing the wine with a gas so that it remains fresh. The list will feature six high-end wines that can be sampled without spending \$500 for a bottle.

The "sweet spot" for a bottle of wine at Stella's ranges from \$30 to \$60 a bottle.

The restaurant offers a menu dubbed "refined world cuisine" with Korean beef sliders, Mexican street tacos, steak and tuna tartare, two fresh pasta dishes, aged steaks, organic chicken, a grilled pork chop and fresh seafood. Entrees range from \$22 to \$36.

Mikedis says Stella's is destination for those who are looking to go someplace after having a meal out elsewhere. When the kitchen closes at 10 p.m., the plan is to offer small plates until closing.

"This is my hobby come to life," Mikedis said, a Saugus resident who is a chef by trade.

He worked his way up through corporate dining, and about 18 years ago, he quit his job. He took time off and went to work at a small company in Boston where he was introduced to senior and school nutrition. In 2008, he and his wife, Stella, founded a food service company called Sidekim Foods in Lynn (Sidekim is Mikedis spelled backward), but sold it in 2017.

Over the course of his career, Mikedis has opened 75 eateries, from quick-service to university dining to Dunkin' Donuts, all for other companies.

"But nothing like this," said Mikedis, who said this is the first restaurant that he opened for himself.

What attracted him to Salem?

"Salem has been such a culinary destination. I've watched it really evolve over the past six, seven years, and (Mayor) Kim Driscoll has done an amazing job transforming the community. And, so, when I thought about it, I'm like, if we are going to do this, we should do it somewhere where there is already a great draw."

Tartine Kitchen & Eatery

In Beverly, Tartine Kitchen & Eatery has added a wine bar to its expanded restaurant.

Co-owners Alexandre and Monika Simon moved from Belgium to the North Shore five years ago. Alexandre hails from a restaurant family and managed one for 25 years. Monika graduated from Endicott College in 1994. When they decided they wanted a change in where they were living, they decided to settle on the North Shore.

"We knew we wanted to open a restaurant, we weren't sure what. And then we were looking for something like this for ourselves, and we said, 'Why don't we open it?' Monika said.

Tartine's signature dish is tartines, which are open-faced sandwiches on artisanal breads. The cafe, which has a kitchen in which everything is made from scratch, also offers seasonal soups, quiches, hot and cold drinks, teas and an assortment of Belgian beers.

After the non-tipping eatery opened a year and half ago, it quickly outgrew its storefront.

They were able to knock down a wall and expand into an adjacent storefront at the corner of Cabot and Wallis streets, allowing it to offer outdoor seating wrapped around the building. The restaurant seats 70 inside and will be able to seat 116 outside when the weather warms up.

Wine bars are rare on the North Shore, they said, and they found their customers were asking for one.

The wine bar concept focuses on the wine, not the food, with small plates designed to go with the wine.

"Here, the wine is the primary product, and you have something light going with it," Alexandre said.

"It's also a very cultural thing for us," Monika said. "In Europe, you do meet after work or on a Saturday or before you go to the theater, after the theater. You meet for a glass of wine."

Tartine's wine selection is eclectic, she said, with vintages from Spain, Slovakia, Portugal, Hungary, Greece, Austria and France.

"We wanted to expand on the 'socialness' of Tartine. Tartine is already a place people meet and gather, which is what we wanted to do in the beginning," Monika said. "But now we have that component, the wine bar, people can come in the evenings as well."

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