

Vino100

100 great wines for \$25 or less BY HEATHER STRANG

THE FOOD AND DRUG Administration's food pyramid sets the standard for America's eating habits. Yet, some think an important food group has gone unrepresented for years. At Vino100, a specialty wine shop in Hillsboro, they think wine should be included in the nation's food pyramid. Not only for its health benefits—remember those all-important antioxidants—but because of its huge popularity in America. In fact, a 2005 Gallup poll reported that wine has replaced beer as the nation's drink of choice.

America's love of wine is what makes shops like Vino100 possible. Co-owner



EUGENIE BELL

Megan Markel and her family first stumbled across the Vino100 concept a couple of years ago while living in Washington D.C.

"We had wanted to get involved with the wine business for a few years," says Markel. "But we weren't sure if we wanted to open a wine bar/restaurant or a specialty wine shop. Once we heard about Vino100, we fell in love with its concept—'100 great wines for \$25 or less.' Vino100 was developed to meet the growing customer demand for a user-friendly, affordable wine store."

To make wine less intimidating and more accessible to the average consumer, Vino100 hosts free, themed wine tastings every Friday and Saturday—giving guests a chance to sample some of Vino100's eclectic array of wines. And since education is an important part of the Vino100 experience, Markel and her staff are there to discuss the selections and offer tips for getting the most out of a

tasting, such as the three "S" standard—swirl, smell and sip.

Eric Beam, a self-described wine "newbie" and a three "S" practitioner, attends Vino100 wine tastings regularly. "The list of wines I have tried is growing steadily. Right now, I'm enjoying Casamatta 2003, which means 'crazy house' in Italian. It is 100 percent Sangiovese varietal. Another new favorite is Whiskers Blake Tawny Port dessert wine from Australia by Hardy's."

In addition to the tastings, the shop presents classes twice a month on pairing wine with cheese, chocolate and appetizers. By partnering with local experts, such as Mary Bergner, a personal chef in the Portland area, and "Cheese Chick" Christine Hyatt, Vino100 helps customers determine the best pairings for each.

"It was great to see how the wine and cheese brought out flavors in each other that you wouldn't notice without the pairing," says Elizabeth Dutton, a recent class participant. "And I found my new favorite cheese—Willamette Valley's Farmstead Brindisi."

For those with a more broad knowledge of wine, Vino100 offers lesser-known varietals, such as those from Spain, Chile and Argentina. Vino100's wine selection, both to purchase and taste, constantly rotates, so customers can expect new discoveries at every visit. The shop also consistently stocks 12-15 obscure Oregon wines that Markel and family consider to be extraordinary.

"Wine should be fun. You don't stress out about the kind of orange you pick at the supermarket. Wine should be no different. Just keep trying new types of wine and have fun with it. Our mission is to make wine approachable and enjoyable," says Markel.

With artisan and local wines, weekly tastings and wine education classes, Vino100 is doing its part to make wine one of America's important food groups. □

Must-Have Oregon Wines

Descriptions and prices courtesy of Vino100.

Four Graces Pinot Gris 2004 (\$18.75)

Handcrafted by one of Oregon's most famous winemakers, Laurent Montalieu. Estate grown Pinot Gris is powerfully aromatic—Asian pear, citrus blossom and honeycomb. A touch of residual sugar helps to balance the bright acidity. Perfect to enjoy on the patio in warm weather.

Anam Cara Pinot Noir 2003 (\$30)

Full-bodied wine, leans towards the fruitier style of Pinot Noir. Juicy plum, blackberry and cherry flavors on the palate. Anam Cara is Celtic for "friend of my soul." The fruit is taken from the Chehalem Mountain in the Willamette Valley. Only 200 cases produced.

Vidon Vineyards Pinot Noir 2004 (\$35)

Made in true French Burgundy style, this Pinot is lighter in color but is a great blend of old and new world styles. Supple and balanced, yet powerful. 268 cases made.

Velocity Vineyards "Velo" 2003 (\$18)

A beautiful blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc from the Rogue Valley in Southern Oregon. Only 401 cases produced.

Hip Chicks Do Wine Pinot Noir 2004 (\$12.50)

Light-bodied with a nice spicy finish. Bottled locally in Portland.