

Title:

Buying Wine, Step 1: Pick A Wine Store.

Word Count:

939

Summary:

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But I like wine, especially trying different kinds. There are tons of resources out there to help you learn about wine. But I don't have time to read them. So I learn by doing, or . . . by drinking.

My only problem is knowing which bottle to pick. If you put me in a wine store with over a thousand bottles, I either need a sommelier or a psychiatrist.

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Keywords:

Kansas City restaurants, dining, menus, entertainment

Article Body:

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But I like wine, especially trying different kinds. There are tons of resources out there to help you learn about wine. But I don't have time to read them. So I learn by doing, or . . . by drinking.

My only problem is knowing which bottle to pick. If you put me in a wine store with over a thousand bottles, I either need a sommelier or a psychiatrist.

I usually start by studying the notes that hang by the bottles. The ones with names attached to them like Wine Spectator or Robert Parker or Bill, the stocker. I contemplate the pictures and colors of the label. I analyze the pricing structure and weigh costs and benefits. Then after an hour or so, when I'm completely frustrated, I make a completely arbitrary decision.

So I've come to this conclusion. I need help. And, since my shrink has his limits, I need to find a wine store with people who can help me through the

process of buying a good bottle.

All wine stores are not created equal. Here are some of the factors to think about when choosing a wine store:

1) Selection

Don't be fooled. Having thousands of bottles is not the same as having a good selection. Many large liquor stores stockpile wine with labels that are heavily advertised and sold with the largest discount. You may walk into a store and think you've got thousands of choices, but all you really have is same bottles repeated over and over.

What makes a good selection? Look for a store: (1) with a knowledgeable wine buyer and (2) with a variety of tastes, regions, and prices. A good selection will offer both wines that are familiar and unique. Why is selection important? Think of it as playing the odds. You're much better off choosing from a few hundred wines tasted by a knowledgeable buyer than from several thousand that were trucked en masse.

2) Storage

If you walk into a store and start to sweat, turn around. Wine should not be stored at temperatures over 80 degrees, or it will lose its flavor. That's why wine is usually made and stored underground. Avoid large warehouses where the temperature may be hard to control. Seek out a wine store where the workers are happy wearing sweaters in the summer. It's likely that the wine will be well-cooled and happy too.

3) Information

A good wine store is a good source of information. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions and seek out staff recommendations. Many stores in Kansas City offer wine tastings, which are a great opportunity to try before you buy.

4) Price

Of course, wine prices vary widely, and I've never found one store that's consistently cheaper. Even the big discount shops are not always money savers. After you've found a store that you like based on the other three factors, you can save money by subscribing to that store's newsletters or joining its tasting club. Often, stores send out special deals and offerings to these customers first.

A special fifth category is convenience. This matters especially when you're buying in bulk, or if you are looking for a quick pick-up on the way home from work. It's good to know where several good stores are in town, so that you'll know which one to hit whenever the feeling strikes.

Here are my picks (in no particular order) for great wine stores in Kansas City:

1. Cellar and Loft. Located in Brookside, this little shop is much more than meets the eye. The upstairs is the "Loft," a showplace of new and antique home furnishings and décor. Downstairs, you can wind your way around "Cellar," a labyrinth of sorts with a good variety of wines, beers, gourmet foods, kitchen items, and more. 112 W 63rd St, Kansas City, MO, (816) 444-2444.

2. Cellar Rat. This unique boutique in the Crossroads is the anti-superstore of wine. Cellar Rat prides itself on offering a hand-picked selection with personalized service. Cellar Rat's restored building is impressive itself. The 5,000-square-foot shop at also carries artisan beers, gourmet meats, cheeses, spirits, cigars and chocolates. 1701 Baltimore Ave., Kansas City, MO (816) 221 9463.

3. Vino 100. If you are in South KC, you should check out Vino 100. Vino 100's concept is to offer over 100 bottles of wine for \$25 or less. The store is well-organized and the also offers a unique selection of cigars, single-malt scotch, cognacs, port, smoking accessories and wine gifts. 13135 State Line Road, Kansas City, MO, 64145 (816) 941-VINO (8466).

4. Lukas Liquor / The Wine Bar. If size matters to you, Lukas Liquor bills itself as the midwest's largest merchant of fine wines, spirits, and malt beverages. It has recently expanded by adding the Wine Bar, which offers cooking classes, event space for corporate teambuilding or meetings, and regular wine and liquor tastings. 13657 Washington Street, Kansas City, MO 64145, (816) 942-8707.

5. Rimann Liquors. No matter where you are in Kansas City, there is likely a Rimann Liquor nearby. Stores are located in Lenexa, Prairie Village, and most recently, in Briarcliff. For three years in a row, Food & Wine Magazine named Rimann in its list of "Top Wine Shops in America" based on selection, service and advice. Briarcliff: 4155 North Mulberry, Kansas City, MO 64116, (816) 587-3399; Prairie Village: 3917 Prairie Lane, Prairie Village, KS 66208 (913) 236-5311; Lenexa: 15117 W. 87th St. Parkway Lenexa, KS 66219 (913) 492-1604.

6. Ensimnger Liquors. Ensimnger offers a variety of wine personally selected by

its proprietress, Judy Ensminger. It's Judy's belief that "there are no bad wines, just different wines for different events." 11052 Quivira Road, Overland Park, KS 66210 (913) 469-9006.

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