



INNOVATION



God bless help yourself wine bars

Kate Fuller

Hospitality fads like tapas and sushi bars or Sunday morning yum cha, come in and out of popular culture like child stars. Some survive and flourish, while others become so mass marketed they completely lose their appeal—remember when fondue was the height of sophistication?

The latest hospitality fad taking over the US are ‘serve yourself’ wine bars, which in spite of the recession have been popping up all over the nation since the establishment of New York’s Clo Wine Bar + Shop in 2008.

Erika Strum wrote of the new phenomenon sweeping the nation last November in *Wine Enthusiast*.

“Serve yourself wine bars are sprouting up across the country, allowing patrons to taste on their own—the swipe of a tasting card is all that’s required,” she wrote.

“Be on the lookout for one of these sampling paradises to spring up near you.”

From a wine industry perspective, the most exciting feature of the new wine bars is not only the serve yourself concept—which is still reasonably unique in the US—it’s their lean toward educating consumers about different wine regions and varietals from around the world.

“Customers can sample a \$75 glass of Penfolds Grange if so inclined, or stick with more affordable small-production wines,” Erika Strum writes of Evo Bistro in McLean, Virginia.

Traci Smith from San Diego’s recently established serve yourself wine bar, Splash, says the concept is less about big

names and more about offering variety.

“My concept for Splash is to offer small production boutique wines from all over the world, especially the varietals you don’t find very often,” she says.

“In order to have a point of difference—and you need a point of difference to survive this economy—we made the decision to serve wines not often seen on other wine lists. We swap our wines over all the time, I get new labels in twice a week—we recently had a Chardonnay from Australia, obviously Shiraz and at the moment we have a sparkling Shiraz that is doing very well.”

Traci opened Splash in December last year after seeing the serve yourself Enomatic wine serving system in a Florida restaurant.

“A lot of places were using the Enomatic system behind the bar or in wine shops, but I hadn’t seen the serve yourself tasting concept before,” Traci explains. “I thought it was a really neat and unique idea and knew it would go really well in San Diego.”

Enomatic is an Italian based company founded by two Tuscan entrepreneurs in 2002. After only seven years in the industry their products are now being used all over the world and are available in more than 73 countries.

“I have the 72 bottle Enomatic system which allows me to have 24 whites and 48 reds pouring at the one time,” Traci says.

“Each wine has a tasting card above it, which we supply as a way to educate consumers about the different wines and varietals. It’s a lot less intimidating than a wine list, you can just pick and

choose at your leisure—it’s a great way to learn about wine in a really fun and relaxed way.”

Salute Wine Bar in Santa Monica, California, also opened its doors in December last year, introducing the Enomatic system and the world of wine to Hollywood.

“The idea behind Salute was driven by European wine bars, where the Enomatic system is already very well established,” says co-owner Tony Hosseini.

“Our bar has a cocktail party atmosphere with lounges and dim lighting, as though it were someone’s home. And just like you would at home, the Enomatic system allows you to serve your own drinks at your own pace.”

Like Splash, Salute stocks wines from all over the world with a specific focus on the Southern Hemisphere.

“We have wines from Europe but also like to offer wines from South Africa, Chile, New Zealand and Australia,” Tony says.

“We change our wines regularly but at the moment we have Brothers in Arms, Peter Lehmann and Layer Cake from Australia.”

With trained staff wandering the floor ready to answer questions about the wines on offer, information about new wines and varieties is never very far away.

“We have trained staff who stand by the Enomatic and offer information to anyone wanting to learn about the wines,” Tony says. “The serve yourself concept makes wine tasting that little bit more relaxed and sociable, and encourages discussion about wine. It’s a great way to educate consumers.”