



The Press Club, San Francisco: The Best Wine Bar I've Ever Been To

Part of any wine tasting experience is the vibe of the place. What kind of mood do the room, the people, the ambiance create? There can be a fine line to walk in the world of wine. Elegance is clearly part of wine, and most tasting-rooms I've visited focus on the more chic aspects of it. My perspective, however, is that if there's not much socializing involved, then what's the point of going out of the house to taste? At the Press Club in San Francisco, they've walked the line quite expertly.

There is an energy to the place. I notice it simply making my way down the stairs. You would never guess the tasting room used to be a rundown basement. The designer, Christian Von Eckartsberg, made sure of that. The ample, open counter space gives patrons plenty of room to congregate. Small tables are spread invitingly across the main floor, and semi-private couches reside at the corners. Even on a crowded night, there's room to talk about whatever suits your fancy, to share your thoughts on the wine or just on life. It's the laughter, the buzz of conversation that really give the place its vibe, gives it an almost tangible energy. Of course, with such great wines to taste, how could it not?

Co-founders Jan Wiginton and Andy Chung have recruited some outstanding wineries to take up residence at the Press Club. Hence, along with enjoying the company of fellow enthusiasts, one can get a real sense of just how elegant wine can be. Included among the ranks are Chateau Montelena (yes, the one from the famous '73 Paris tasting) and Miner Family Vineyards, representing the Napa Valley. Saintsbury, Fritz Winery, and Hanna Winery account for the Sonoma region. Mount Edna and their wines hail from the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Every winery offers a range of what they produce, so whether you are a fan of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Cabernet, or another varietal, there's something for all wine lovers to enjoy. One night is simply not long enough to sample every winery's collection, but that's far from a bad thing. Of the bottles I was privileged to taste, there were several standouts.

Each of Mount Eden's Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs were excellent. They all had excellent depth of flavor and the structure to age very nicely over the next few years. Don't be fooled if their tasting counter is a bit on the quiet side. It's only because this gem of a winery, along with the rest of the Santa Cruz Mountains, are still greatly under appreciated. Chateau Montelena had a very nice Zinfandel and an excellent Cabernet Sauvignon. Saintbury's Carneros Chardonnay is quite good for about \$20, and their Roger's Creek Syrah was superb. Miner offered two very good Chardonnays and a wonderful red blend called the Oracle. My evening was cut short before I could sample Hanna or Fritz's wines, but a regular patron I chatted with assured me they were both quite good. A return trip will be in order to confirm this report.

I left the Press Club feeling like I'd experienced something special. I got to enjoy the luxurious elements of wine, and I got to do it while carrying on some fantastic conversation. Thus, for anyone who loves to enjoy great wine, great friends, or is simply looking for a happening spot to spend the evening, I would highly recommend checking the place out. You can sample a splendid range of California wine from several different regions, and you can indulge in all of them without leaving the energy of San Francisco. You can check the club out on the web (<http://www.pressclubsf.com/>), but I would very much encourage a visit in person.