

DRINK

CALIFORNIA WINES SURFACE IN PRESS CLUB'S UNDERGROUND TASTING ROOM.



Food and wine bar

A tour through California's wine country typically involves a long, winding drive through hills of vineyards followed by a series of longer, dusty winery driveways. The wines waiting to be sampled sit in tasting rooms... at the far end of the gravelly path. Your anticipated day of swirling, sniffing and tasting just as easily becomes a tiresome day of driving. But at San Francisco's recently opened Press Club, miles away from grape and vine, you can experience the fruits of eight different wineries just down one flight of stairs. "People tend to visit San Francisco thinking wine country's right around the corner," says Press Club's co-founder, Andrew Chun. It's not. "Our

goal was to bring several wineries together in a single urban space, while maintaining the authenticity and the information one gains from visiting a winery's tasting room on site."

Like the designer lounge in an upscale department store, Press Club operates as a chic, one-stop tour featuring several of northern California's best wine producers, including Chateau Montelena, Fritz Winery and Mount Eden Vineyards, all choicely curated to represent the various river valleys and their offerings. Press Club's name refers to a wine press, and it's a fitting title for the goal at hand: to create a collective of wineries in a sociable and atmospheric setting that appeals to visitors and locals alike. To achieve this goal, Chun and his partner Jan Wiginton called on Baldauf Catto Von Eckartsberg Architects, the same firm responsible for San Francisco's Ferry Building marketplace, to forge a 9,000-square-foot space beneath the Four Seasons Hotel on Yerba Buena Lane. The result: a behemoth underground sanctuary encapsulating the traditional palette of the local wine country but presented in the context of an urban lounge. Walnut bars, sleek wood paneling and earth-toned fabrics lend themselves to the natural, pastoral side of wine production while concrete floors, stainless steel bottle drops and metal-rimmed accents highlight the industrial.

In addition to the eight tasting bays manned by staff members from the individual wineries, a retail area for bottle purchases resides upstairs (should you enjoy what they've poured below). Back downstairs, a central bar offers a food menu with small plates designated for specific wine pairings, while glass doors give way to private dining rooms with sprawling farmhouse-style tables. Try a creamy butternut squash soup with a vibrant chardonnay from Saintsbury or an Asian-spiced Peking duck accompanied by Landmark Vineyard's Steel Plow Syrah. Tippling is generally by the flight, but wines are also available by the glass or bottle, giving novices and oenophiles even more incentive to stick around and savor the stylish surroundings. In a city known for its sloping landscape, now there's good reason to duck below-ground. **LAURA NEILSON**



Tasting bay



Private dining room