

SAN FRANCISCO Business Times

Wine lovers cozy up to Press Club

BY SARAH DUXBURY

San Francisco Business Times

The Napa Valley wine tasting experience has set up shop in San Francisco.

Press Club opens next week in 9,000 square feet on Yerba Buena Lane. It is a novel concept that blends the wine bar craze with the information and intimacy of visiting a winery. Eight boutique wineries have set up tasting stations, each with its own 15-foot tasting bar in one of two horseshoe-shaped nooks. They are Miner, Fritz, Hanna, Saintsbury, Pahlmeyer, Château Montelena, Landmark and Mount Eden; all have a five-year commitment.

Press Club will provide not breadth but depth, featuring limited edition and winery-only wines.

"We aren't a wine shop," said Andrew Chun, the founder of Press Club with Jan Wiginton. "We want to offer intimacy with each of our wineries."

That intimacy will primarily target visitors and conventioners, those with limited time in the city and unable to make a day-long trip to wine country. Each tasting area is staffed by a representative of that winery.

Though Landmark already has its own Sonoma tasting room, its proprietor, Mary Calhoun, said she sees the San Francisco location as an opportunity to get in front of customers who wouldn't otherwise taste Landmark.

"The business opportunity is not only to sell wine at retail, but it's also a tremendous opportunity to sign up wine club members and to introduce people to our friends of the vineyard program," she said.

The success of the Ferry Building fed Chun and Wiginton's ambition. Sure, one can visit Cowgirl Creamery in Pt. Reyes and Scharffenberger in Berkeley, "but you



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Founders Chun and Wiginton bring Napa Valley to S.F.

don't lose anything by bringing it all together," Chun said. "And if it works for food, why not wine?"

Nestled into the basement of the Four Seasons, the hotel owner, Millennium Partners, is also Press Club's main investor, with more than \$4 million in the project.

"We were very interested in this business," said Sean Jeffries, a principal with Millennium. "This was something we thought would also enhance the value and experience of Four Seasons guests and residents. There are intangibles we very much like."

Despite the softer economy, the combination of a weak dollar and the city's convention schedule have Press Club's founders and Jeffries optimistic.

"Tourism is stronger than it's been in years, and because that's the focus for our business, it's a huge win for us," Wiginton said.

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