

City Winery Provides Answers

A few months ago, noting the proliferation of facilities that, for a fee, permit the general public to join in the hilarity that is winemaking, I posed this question: Will somebody please explain to me [why I should be interested in urban wineries?](#)

The question has been dogging me since then. So, now that [City Winery](#) in downtown Manhattan has officially opened in all its manifestations – winery, music venue, restaurant, event space, lecture hall – I went down to check it out. What I found is the subject of [my column](#) in Wednesday's newspaper.

Let me say right away that City Winery is a very cool space. The restaurant, which began dinner service this week and will begin lunch next week, has a nice selection of [cheeses](#) from Murray's. It offers plates of [salumi](#), also from Murray's. Could Murray's have a stake in City Winery?

The wine list is terrific, and far more interesting than one might expect. The Champagnes are excellent, but City Winery also offers fascinating but little-known sparkling wines, like the superb [Puro](#) from Movia, and the enchanting [Mauzac](#) from Robert et Bernard Plageoles in Gaillac, an obscure appellation in southwest France.

Here is where things get really interesting: [Domaine le Briseau](#) from the Loire, [Suavia](#) from the Veneto, [Emidio Pepe](#) from Montepulciano, [Rebholz](#) from the Pfalz — and that's just among the whites!

[López de Heredia Rosado](#) from Rioja, [Georges Descombes](#) from Beaujolais,

[Paolo Bea](#) from Umbria, [Cathy Corison](#) from Napa, and I could go on and on. Honestly, I'm just scratching the surface on this wine list of producers that I love.

With a lineup of good musicians as well as interesting winemakers who will be offering talks and tastings, I've got a lot of reasons to want to hang out at City Winery.

But I can't say that making my own wine is among them. I know that's supposedly the big thrill, and for some people, in fact, it is. I don't begrudge anybody the pleasure. Here's how it works:

You get to choose from a menu of grapes that City Winery has already purchased. For its first crush last October, the grapes – cabernet, merlot, zinfandel, syrah, chardonnay, petite sirah and pinot noir – came primarily from California, with a little pinot noir from the Willamette Valley as well. In the future, Michael Dorf, City's proprietor, told me that he will try to get grapes from the Finger Lakes and from Long Island. Also, there will be a second crush this spring, using grapes from Argentina.

The hands-on opportunities are brief, though – sorting grapes at crush, picking out a barrel, discussing blends. Most of the crucial tasks are handled by the professional winemaker, David Lecomte, although input is welcome.

I had the opportunity to taste some of the young wines from the barrels, and they weren't bad at all. We'll see where they really are a year from now, when they're more or less ready to drink.

Still, if I'm sitting at the bar at City Winery, would I order a glass of their home brew? Or something from one of the masters on their wine list? All I can say is, they've set out some steep competition for themselves!