

NIGHT + DAY

WED

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THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE
WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

BEST WINE LISTS

As Valentine's Day approaches, a toast
to San Diego's premier collections

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GOODBYE, KISS: ROCKERS ON FAREWELL TOUR **18** **TRAILBLAZERS:** THE PIONEERING WOMEN OF LA JOLLA **24**

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THINGS

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Bar manager TJ Majeske pours a pino noir by Siduri (from Oregon's Willamette Valley) at Charles + Dinorah.

RAISE YOUR GLASS

We recognize San Diego's finest wine lists — and whine about some others

When the hordes of longtime couples, first-daters and gal-pals descend on San Diego restaurants for Valentine's Day next Thursday, there'll be more than love in the air.

The holiday, says Addison executive chef William Bradley, tends to seduce people into springing for a memorable bottle to uncork.

"For some people, it's the one time of year they're going to indulge, and they tend to be more open-minded," says Bradley, who counts Valentine's Day as Addison's second-busiest night of the year, after New Year's Eve.

While restaurant-goers are raising their glasses to Cupid next week, they might also want to shout-out a toast to restaurants like Addison, with its world-class wine collection of 14,000 bottles and 3,600 different selections.

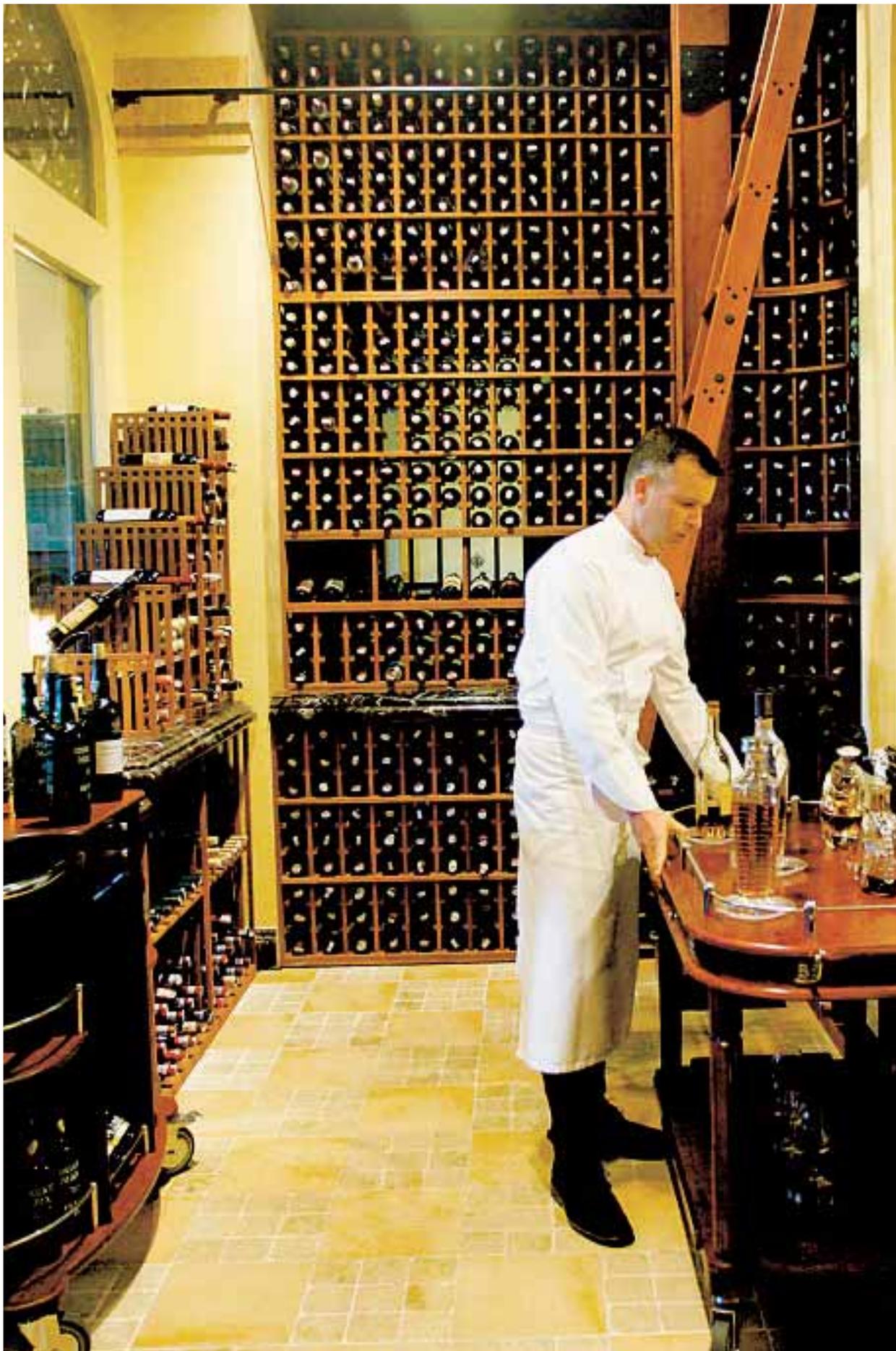
They might also want to drink to the forward-thinking, gorgeously curated wine list at Jeune et Jolie. Or the ridiculously affordable selections at Wine Vault & Bistro. Or the impeccable cuisine-specific offerings at Ironside Fish & Oyster, Cucina Urbana and Et Voilà French Bistro. Or the treasure-trove of classic bottlings at Mr. A's that don't gouge the legions of view-seeking special-occasion diners.

Yes, there's a lot to celebrate about San Diego's wine scene in 2019. Parallel to the elevated dining landscape as a whole here — where a foundation of excellence keeps getting built upon by a new generation of chefs and restaurateurs — wine lovers can point to new and old places that get it right.

There are the venerable places that have been getting it right for years, like Market Restaurant + Bar, Pamplemousse Grill and The WineSellar & Brasserie, and the relative newbies who are putting an exciting spin on the contemporary wine list, such as Juniper & Ivy, Trust and Stake Chophouse & Bar.

Getting it right means lists that have depth *and* finesse, not just a massive trophy collection. Or, if the offerings are limited, they have a nuanced, creative range of popular picks (Napa cab, New Zealand sauvignon blanc) and unexpected finds (Italian arneis, Baja rosé or El Dorado mourvèdre, anyone?).

Winning wine lists should be easy to navigate — settle in if yours comes with a table of contents — and maybe even a little educational. They should pair well with the cuisine and be on par with the restaurant's prices. They should embrace both the aficionado



K.C. ALFRED U-T

Chef William Bradley in the wine cellar at Addison, which has the best wine list in San Diego County.

TIPPLE TIPS

Vote with your feet: If a restaurant with an overpriced wine list just happens to be out of every one of the lowest-priced bottles, opt to go elsewhere next time. Same if all the vintages on the list don't match the year on the bottle.

Ask for help: The days of old-school sommeliers trying to upsell customers are thankfully gone. Good somms will point out values in various price ranges but also give you a little insider information. "My staff is very good at guiding people, as long as people are willing to ask," says Hug of Mr. A's. "I like to ask the sommelier. They'll point out the gems, not just in price but something they are particularly excited about."

Put a cork in it: Can't finish that delicious wine? Ask to bring it home. Perfectly kosher, as long as you travel home with the bottle in the trunk of your car. (Even re-corked, it's an open container.)

Speaking of corks: Corkage fees exist, so don't be timid about bringing a distinctive or meaningful bottle with you to enjoy. Just be classy about it, San Diego. Call ahead to find out the restaurant's policy, don't bring something that's on the wine list, and don't do it just to avoid paying for wine. If a restaurant has gone to the trouble of selecting affordable wines for you, do right by them and order them.

WINNING WINE LISTS

Whether you're looking for a sweetheart deal or a money's-no-object bottle that will rock your world on Valentine's or any day, we're aiming our arrow at some of San Diego's best wine lists.

Best overall

Addison: An extraordinary assemblage befitting San Diego County's undisputed finest culinary experience, Addison's swoon-inducing, Franco-centric list ranges from \$85 to \$9,000. Addison is one of 91 recipients worldwide — and the sole one in San Diego — of The Wine Spectator's highest honor, the Grand Award, which recognizes “restaurants that show an uncompromising, passionate devotion to the quality of their wine programs ... and deliver serious breadth of top producers, outstanding depth in mature vintages, a selection of large-format bottles, excellent harmony with the menu, and superior presentation. These restaurants offer the highest level of wine service.”

Beverage director Rafael Sanchez says the criteria for a bottle to earn a spot there is simple: “Is it delicious and is it world-class?” He estimates that 60 percent of the guests enjoying the \$250-per-person chef's tasting menu will opt for the \$250 wine pairing, and the biggest-selling wine by the glass is a \$50 Napa cab called The Mascot. Well-heeled Addison guests accustomed to quality are the same as the once-in-a-lifetime splurge customer, Sanchez says. “When you're here, you want the experience, the memorable experience. What is the story of the wine and the winemaking? We convey that to the guest and it ... makes it more special,” he says. Being wine director is “a big responsibility, especially because with the price tag, when we open a bottle of wine, it has to be jaw-dropping — angels have to sing.”

Runner-up

Market Restaurant + Bar: Lucky Del Mar. Less than 6 miles away from Addison, Market has a more modest wine list than that of its ultra-elegant neighbor, but it is nonetheless an exciting, value-

filled voyage around the world's best wine regions.

Best collections

Del Frisco's Double Eagle; Pamplemousse; Paon Restaurant and Wine Bar, Mr. A's; Mille Fleurs; George's Cali-



MICHELE PARENTE U-T

Rafael Sanchez says being wine director at Addison is “a big responsibility. ... When we open a bottle of wine, it has to be jaw-dropping — angels have to sing.”

fornia Modern; Stake Chop-house & Bar; The Oak Room at Pala Casino Spa & Resort

Small but delightful

Starlight; Trust; Fort Oak; Jeune et Jolie; The Smoking Goat; Charles + Dinorah; Terra

American Bistro; Bankers Hill Bar + Restaurant; Currant American Bistro

Best steakhouse values

Barona Oaks Steakhouse at Barona Resort & Casino; Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine

Bar; Black & Blue at Valley View Casino & Hotel

Best pairing with cuisine

Top of the Market (seafood); Ironside Fish & Oyster (seafood); Pisco Rotisserie & Cevicheria (Peruvian);

Et Voilà (French); Cucina Urbana, Cucina Enoteca, Cucina Sorella (Italian); Coasterra (Mexican)

Best by-the-glass program

Del Frisco's; Herb + Wood; Fleming's; Juniper & Ivy; Mr. A's; The Winery Restaurant & Wine Bar; Locale at Viejas Casino & Resort

Most fun wine lists to peruse

Juniper & Ivy (for categories such as “Leap of Faith Red”); Cucina Urbana (for including maps, explainers and tidbits); Market (for intuitive organization and fun quotes)

Best place to learn how to pair wine with food

Wine Vault & Bistro: Every meal is a multi-course, affordable fixed-price feast — and never the same menu twice! — that can be paired with carefully chosen wines. Take-home prices for bottles are a steal.

Best wine list overhaul

Kettner Exchange: Kettner recently rebuilt its list, changing 98 percent of the lineup and adding more bubbles and wines from smaller, artisanal producers.

Best restaurants with retail wine licenses

The Cucinas; WineSellar & Brasserie; 3rd Corner Wine-shop and Bistro. Browse the aisles or pick from the list; you'll pay retail plus a small corkage on their excellent and expansive selections.

WINE LISTS

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who'll plunk down hundreds for a grand cru Burgundy and the average diner looking for a reasonably priced Tuesday night bottle — say, somewhere between \$30 and \$69. (Even Addison has dozens of options in the \$40-\$80 range.)

Most important, they shouldn't be marred by excessive markups. As I explained in the 2016 U-T article “\$10? \$100: Why wine costs what it does,” restaurants on average mark up a bottle of wine to three times the wholesale price; a single glass of wine can equal the wholesale bottle price.

Several local wine pros explained that those charges cover the costs of staffing, glassware, storage and other overhead outlays, while bringing in revenue.

“Restaurants don't make money on the food; the profit margin is too small,” said Skip Coomber, founder of Coomber Family Wines. “But they're not the villains here; they have to subsidize the meat, the fish, the staffing.”

That said, there are a magnum's worth of restaurant wine lists to whine about.

Like one restaurant I adore that has barely anything priced under \$100, so I've taken to always bringing my own special bottle and paying the \$25 corkage fee.

Or another favorite place marks up its wine into the stratosphere — with a corkage to match — forcing me to stop going there.

And don't get me started on restaurants that put so much care into their cuisine and cocktails but serve up a snoozy, supermarket-shelf wine program clearly created by corporate sales people and distributors.

Whether it's rooted in greed, laziness or simple indifference, San Diego is brimming with enough uninspired, overpriced wine lists for a breathalyzer to show it over the limit.

“It's terrible — what's going on? Especially at all the new restaurants and steakhouses opening,

they're charging up to four times what they pay for a bottle, or five times for a glass. It's such a ripoff,” says Bertrand Hug, the longtime owner of Mr. A's and Mille Fleurs.

Hug, who values the wine collection for the two venerable restaurants combined at more than \$1 million, says he marks up his wine by two to two-and-a-half times, or — on the more expensive bottles — one-and-a-half times what he paid for them.

“My Bordeaux, if I want to sell them, I have no choice but to charge less,” says Hug.

“I've got an '88 (Château) Mouton Rothschild for \$625 that could go for \$750. And I have an '86 Margaux for \$975 that I paid \$400 for it

at the time.”

In other words, wine lists can be pricey, but that doesn't necessarily make them overpriced.

Complicating the issue at high-end restaurants with costly labels, wine drinkers are apparently embarrassed to order the cheaper bottles.

“I'll be honest, we laugh all the time,” Hug says.

“The affordable wines that are really good — that's what I drink on a Tuesday night — I do have those bottles for 40 or 50 bucks. But we don't sell them. ... If it's not \$75, they don't buy it.”

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