

HIGH SPIRITS

Wine comes in
at the mouth
And love comes
in at the eye;
That's all we shall
know for truth
before we grow
old and die.
I lift the glass to
my mouth,
I look at you,
and I sigh.

"A Drinking Song,"
William Butler Yeats

Story by Sarah Ensor
Photos by Henley Moore



Wine is the spirit of love. Humans have been making wine for about 10,000 years, and like truth, love, and other great thoughts, they have been writing about it since at least the time of the great philosophers.

A traditional drink of people worldwide, wine is part of sacred ceremonies across religions and cultures, is used in

celebrations, such as weddings and graduations, and serves just as well with a takeout mushroom-and-sausage pizza on a Wednesday night.

The Wine Bar in Cambridge is a wine bar and gourmet food market. After taking over the business from previous owners in summer 2016, Ed Johnson and his partner Randy Decker constructed a small kitchen and expanded the pouring bar selections to include sipping liquors and beer.



*“We are all mortal
until the first kiss
and the second
glass of wine.”*
— Eduardo Galeano



Liquors are served only neat or on the rocks, except for the first and last Sunday of each month, when they have bottomless Bloody Mary cocktails and mimosas.

In 2017, the pair founded Chillin’ on the Choptank, a wine festival scheduled to be held again Memorial Day weekend 2018. The festival is a fundraiser for summer programs in Dorchester County.

Johnson and Decker believe wine is for everyone, and a good bottle of wine need not break the bank.

“We are not some hoity-toity wine bar. We are not. We believe in good, affordable wines,” Johnson said. “We cater to everybody.”

Their philosophy stocks their retail shelves and the bar, where a wine tasting could be paired with a cheese plate, an assortment of gourmet chocolate, or soup and a sandwich.

Johnson offered several wine suggestions from his stock.

Sparkling wines are perfect for toasting occasions, which are plentiful in February, and can lend a celebratory feel to an ordinary day.

Tavernello Prosecco DOC is sweet and smooth on the front of the palate, with acidity opening mid-palate. Notes of citrus fruit and orange flower make this a perfect aperitif or brunch wine, although it also would be a lovely companion to a dessert, such as a key lime pie or strawberry cheesecake. DOC is an Italian designation. It stands for Denominazione di Origine Controllata, or Controlled Designation of Origin. To earn this designation, a wine must be produced according to certain standards and is limited to certain regions of Italy.

In the mood for a love story? The 2016 Bila-Haut rosé calls for its drinker while still on the counter. Its lovely bouquet is strawberry and roses. It is crisp on the front of the

A wine tasting at The Wine Bar, a gourmet food market and wine bar in Cambridge, could be paired with a cheese plate, an assortment of gourmet chocolate, or soup and a sandwich.

palate and warms mid-palate with notes of strawberry, rose, and melon.

The love story is in the label, which, like other Michel Chapoutier wines, includes braille. Although there are many stories as to why Chapoutier (and now other) wine labels have braille, the most accepted version is that Michel Chapoutier was inspired by his friend, French musician Gilbert Montagné, who once said in an interview that he had trouble selecting wine without a friend accompanying him.

Chapoutier learned incorporating braille is simple, and he began printing his labels with braille. His first wine label to include braille was for his Monier de la Sizeranne Hermitage, according to the *New York Times*. He worked with the French Association for the Blind to create the label in honor of the association’s founder and member of the family who previously owned the vineyard, Maurice de la Sizeranne.

Johnson said heavy red wines are most popular with customers of The Wine Bar, who tend to be people who enjoy wine and know something about it.

Ancient Peaks, a winery out of Paso Robles, Calif., offers a number of wines, including a fine example of a California Zinfandel — a little wild and uncontained — but always fun and interesting. This medium-bodied red is rich, with notes of blackberries, raspberries, and cherries, as well as subtler leather and pipe tobacco, and a hint of black pepper. 

