

by the glass



RISE OF THE machines

Encouraging sales by the glass instead of the bottle may sound like bad business, but **Patricia Langton** finds that today's preservation systems are revolutionising this offer



YOU'RE ON your way to catch a Eurostar train at St Pancras station and you fancy a glass of wine. A small bar catches your eye – Des Vins – among other assorted gift shops, food stores and restaurants. As you enter you see a row of smart-looking wine dispensers prominently displayed behind the bar offering 36 different wines – white, rosé or red – all by the glass. Who could have

imagined this kind of scenario only a few years ago?

Advances in preservation technology are enabling on-trade operators to make the most of the opportunities that by-the-glass presents. There is now a wide range of equipment to keep wine in good condition ranging from hand-held portable devices such as Wine Saver Pro that uses inert gas and costs a few

hundred pounds to sophisticated cabinets (Enomatic, Cruvinet, WineStation and Oz Bars).

Clare Young, of consultants Vintellec, says: “The most significant change is the introduction of inert gas systems with measured dispense for customer use and stock control. Thanks to inert gas dispensing systems (as opposed to vacuum systems) businesses no longer need to rely on staff remembering to seal bottles.”

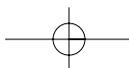
Des Vins installed four Enomatics just over two years ago and the system clearly works well for this busy bar where the glass (125 or 175ml) is preferable to the bottle for customers with a train to catch. Champagne is also available by the glass, although not from the Enomatic (the manufacturer has only just developed a dispenser for sparkling wines, as featured at Tony Crolla’s new Edinburgh wine bar Divino).

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

The Kensington Wine Rooms was one of the first venues to feature the Enomatic in a big way when it opened last year. There are five Enomatics in the bar area and customers can select from 40 wines by the glass (including a generous number of classic French styles) using a card payment facility. Prices range from £2.80 to around £85 per glass and wines sold in this format are not sold at a premium to those sold by the bottle.

“Around 75% of our customers who come here in the evening serve themselves and try wines with different courses. The system enables people to try special wines,” says Richard Okroj, one of the partners in the restaurant.

The choice of wines is changed according to the season with more reds



by the glass



offered in the autumn and winter months. According to Okroj, most wines are suited to the cabinet with the exception of some “fragile styles”, such as older vintages of Côte-Rôtie.

Okroj and his partners picked one of the most affluent areas of London for their new venture just over a year ago, confident that they were offering something different. The initial expenditure for five cabinets including installation costs was an eye-watering £45,000, but the new concept has gone down well with the locals who are prepared to pay up to £100 for fine wines by the glass. “The machines attract a lot of people but you need to make them key to your concept,” adds Okroj.

However, anyone considering this kind of technology needs to know how to maintain it as well and consider this as a time factor. As Okroj points out: “The machines have to be clean to work properly – wine is sticky – so they need ‘line cleaning’ each day.”

Okroj and his partners now hope to build on the success of their first venture with The Fulham Wine Rooms which is due to open in November. This will be a larger restaurant housing six Enomatics and a range which gives prominence to the New World, notably Australia, with the aim of attracting wine-loving ex-pats that live in the area.

At the Refinery in London’s SE1, operations manager Taskin Muzaffer agrees that a system such as the Enomatic is expensive to buy and run, not to mention time consuming to maintain, but points to plenty of benefits: “When The Refinery is busy, our Enomatic is great for customers as they can choose top-quality wines at leisure without waiting at the bar,” she explains. “There is also little wastage, it’s a very efficient system and it’s something a bit different – very few

The carafe: an unexploited opportunity?

ARBUTUS restaurant in the heart of Soho has offered all its wines by the carafe (250ml) since it opened in 2006. Tom Slegg, restaurant manager, says: "The carafes encourage guests to try wines they wouldn't normally have done, whether it be for price reasons or because it is something they are unfamiliar with. For example, we serve an interesting Lebanese white wine, Château Khoury Chardonnay/Gewürztraminer/Riesling, that would probably not sell much if only offered by the bottle, but we sell a lot of carafes. People often end up buying three carafes – but this costs them no more as a third of a bottle here is a third of the price."

TERROIRS offers the "very popular" pot Lyonnais (500ml) carafe alongside its by-the-glass list. Doug Wregg says: "The carafe is the ideal quantity for lunch. I also think that carafes demystify the wine somehow by taking them out of the bottle. There is something generous and hospitable about a carafe. Furthermore, they work well in conjunction with wines by the glass in terms of turning around stock and minimising wastage. Once you serve a carafe you've pretty well killed a bottle; there's only a glass and a bit to sell."

bars currently have one."

The Refinery also uses Le Verre de Vin, a system which preserves still, sparkling and fortified wines and enables the venue to offer these in six different

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wine flights.

Over at The Star & Garter, a sizeable pub/restaurant in Putney, general manager Sally Ellaway believes that a system such as the Enomatic is "the only way to offer a large number of wines by the glass". Here 40 wines are available by

the glass and wine flights have just been introduced pairing three or six wines with cheeses.

She adds: "Wine by the glass is an important feature at The Star & Garter, particularly during the week when clients tend to drop in rather than spend an evening mulling over a bottle of wine. We aim to offer the best value for money with our wines right down to our house wines which are not flooded with inferior grapes or bizarre blends. When we offer well-known wines such as Pinot Grigio we ensure that it is of superior quality and that

way we ensure our customers trust our knowledge and maintain our reputation."

For Hotel TerraVina, at Netley Marsh on the edge of the New Forest, owned by the recently anointed world's best sommelier, Gerard Basset MS MW, there are various reasons for offering a good wine-by-the

glass selection. TerraVina head sommelier Laura Rhys believes: "It's important for any establishment to have a solid, varied selection of wine by the glass that complements its menu. But it's especially important here as we are in the countryside so more often than not people have to drive to get to us and a bottle of wine is not always practical."

Outlining TerraVina's offer of 15 wines (excluding dessert wines) available in glasses of 125ml, 175ml and the 250cl CaraVina carafe, Rhys adds: "We don't have a huge list by the glass. This ensures that not too many bottles are open at one time and therefore wastage is kept to a minimum."

An Enomatic has been a feature at TerraVina since it opened for business three years ago. Rhys sees a number of benefits: "On the whole I think that the machines are a good investment. They keep the wines in good condition and they are a great talking point – it's very striking behind the bar. They also show customers that we take wines by the glass seriously."

WHEN MACHINES DON'T WORK

However, Rhys also points to some negative aspects: "We did have some teething problems with the machines and sometimes we have to remove a wine from our by-the-glass list because it's just not suitable for the Enomatic. For example, we had a Hermitage 2001. It was a fantastic wine, but after a couple of days in the machine it just

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didn't taste right. Also, if there is any sediment in the bottles then that can be tricky as the pipe pulls wine from the bottom of the bottles."

Some restaurants may not have the space, requirement or a suitable wine offer to justify an Enomatic. When Bar Pepito, little brother to King's Cross Spanish restaurant Camino, opened earlier this year the bijou Sherry bar featured an Enomatic in the corner but it didn't work out here for various reasons. "The Enomatic is a great idea and works really well for some operations," says Camino's managing director Richard Bigg. "But our range at Pepito is too limited to justify an Enomatic." And while Pepito has been well received, fine Sherry is still waiting to be discovered by today's new generation of wine enthusiasts and arguably needs a hand-sell.

At Terroirs, the central London restaurant owned by wine importer Les Caves de Pyrene, wines are offered in various formats (see box, left). There are around 35 wines by the glass including dessert wines and five Sherries. "At Terroirs many of the wines will be unfamiliar to our customers and only by doing them by the glass or the carafe is there an incentive to try them," says Les Caves de Pyrene sales & marketing director Doug Wregg. "The choice has to be

good; I would rather have one good white and one good red than a long list of mediocrity."

Terroirs has a temperature-controlled wine room and uses a Vacu Vin system to keep wines fresh. Wregg adds: "Since normally quite a lot of wine is sold by the glass the stock is rotated. The most expensive wines by the glass (and consequently the ones that sell the least) are also the ones that actually benefit from being open an extra day or so."

At the end of the day, stock rotation is vital irrespective of preservation systems. Once open, a wine needs to be sold and if a wine isn't selling it shouldn't be on the by-the-glass list.

But can those considering advanced preservation technology expect to see

more affordable equipment? Young believes that this will be the case: "More systems are being introduced to the market almost every month and prices will continue to fall. Lower prices will mean that cabinet dispensing systems are likely to become accessible to more businesses and they will soon become standard bar equipment for all wine-conscious venues." *db*

