

Just a taste

A new Wilmington restaurant wants to fuel the passion for fine wine by letting customers sample a few sips at a time

By ROGER MORRIS

Special to The News Journal
10/14/2005

WILMINGTON -- Tom Hudson has a plan for making sure that he gets to meet people who know a lot about wine, and people who want to know more about it -- **Domaine Hudson**, the bar and restaurant Hudson is opening this month. It's designed to allow novices and fanatics alike to choose from 100 different bottles and a broad array of wines by the glass.



Tom Hudson's passion for fine wine enticed him away from his 20-year career as a CPA and into a new venture as a wine-bar owner in Wilmington.

"I wanted to create the kind of place where I would want to go," Hudson says as last-minute preparations swirl around him. "I think people should be able to sample a new wine without having to pay \$10 a glass."

The concept for **Domaine Hudson** is simple -- a place where you can stop for a glass of wine and linger for dinner. Thirty to 50 wines will be sold by the glass in three different-size pours -- 1 1/2 (\$2.25-\$5.25), 3 (\$4.50-\$10.50) and 5 ounces (\$7.50-\$17.50). Similarly, a variety of small plates of gourmet food will be



Domaine's focus on sampling allows patrons to select several wines and dishes to mix and match.

available for about \$7 to \$14 each. Want an entree? Then the size and price can be doubled.

Specialized equipment will ensure wine is stored and served at the proper temperature, and customers will sip from elegant-yet-durable glasses made by the well-regarded German firm Schott Zwiesel.

"If you can try a new or different wine for \$3," Hudson says, "then you really can't make a mistake."

The ambience feels intimate and clubby. Burgundy-colored walls simulate antique-leather. The podium in the entry is a converted floor-model radio cabinet, and to the side is library-style seating with a couch and chairs in front of a case full of wine books and magazines. Brazilian jazz plays softly on the sound system. Hudson aims to be open by the end of October.

Hudson, who left a career as an accountant to open the restaurant, says value and affordability are keystones in his selection of wines.

"I define value as a wine that is drinking better than its price point," he says. About 75 percent of the bottles on our wine list will be under \$50," he says. "Our prices will be the retail price plus \$20 for wines that



Special to The News Journal/CHUCK MCGOWEN

Domaine Hudson will pour 1 1/2, 3 and 5 ounces of wine so customers can sample.



Special to The News Journal/CHUCK MCGOWEN

The library room at Domaine Hudson in Wilmington offers patrons a cozy spot to taste a little wine and have a bite to eat.

FINDING THE RIGHT WINE

We chose three small plates from Domaine Hudson's menu and then sampled six wines by the glass (small pours) to see which matched best. These dishes were prepared by chef Jason Barrowcliff:

- Roasted cauliflower, prosciutto, and pea salad with Parmesan curls and green-olive tapenade vinaigrette.
- Roasted garlic and Yukon gold potato waffle topped by smoked salmon with chive sour cream and caviar.
- Wild mushroom and goat cheese napoleon with caramelized onions and potato crisps.

would sell for over \$20 a bottle, and retail plus \$15 for those under \$20." Hudson also says that many of his wines are not currently being sold in Delaware, like the 2003 Lageder "Benfizio" pinot grigio and the 2004 Hugh Hamilton "Jim Jim" McLaren Vale Shiraz. Hudson has hired Jason Barrowcliff, former executive chef at Dilworthtown Inn in Chester County, Pa. There will not be a themed menu, Barrowcliff says, although he will emphasize seafood.

A sampling of Barrowcliff's menu-in-progress has a soup made of butternut squash with crème fraîche crouton and one with cream of almond with apricot. Salads include crab and avocado and one with garlic waffles with heirloom tomato chutney. There are small plates of corn-meal-crust oysters with chipotle rémoulade and of lamb chops with porcini and roasted-tomato risotto. Desserts such as fig terrine with hazelnuts and strawberries au poivre with red wine, along with cheese plates, complete the menu.

Initially, the wine bar and eatery, as Hudson classifies it, will only be open in the evenings, but he plans one day to serve lunch as well. "We don't want to rush things," he says.

Hudson, boyish-looking with thinning blond hair, says, "My professional colleagues said, 'What are you

The six wines

2003 LAGEDER "BENFIZIUM" PINOT GRIGIO (\$2.70 for small tasting). Like a green, mellow-flavored apple, with great acidity.

2004 DONA BEATRIZ RUEDA VERDEJO (\$2.25). The juicy, lightly grassy, mineral flavors showed the perfect counterpoint for the waffle with smoked salmon.

2003 STOLPMAN "L'AVION" SANTA YNEZ ROUSSANNE/VIIGNIER (\$3). Beautiful wine with brown butter, bananas, and papaya flavors that married perfectly with the fullness of the goat cheese napoleon.

2003 PERLAT MONTSAT (\$2.25). This Spanish grenache-led blend leaps from the brier straight into the mouth with tart, fresh blackberry flavors, which formed a good backbone for the earthy cauliflower and salty ham.

2004 HUGH HAMILTON "JIM JIM" MCLAREN VALE SHIRAZ (\$2.25). Dark blueberries and firm tannins give this Aussie plenty of lush flesh to go with its abs of steel.

2002 UNTI DRY CREEK ZINFANDEL (\$3). Classic zin from this classic growing ground -- Dry Creek. Ripe plums and high alcohol make this a great sipper. Forget the food.

IF YOU GO **Domaine Hudson**

1314 Washington St., Wilmington

655-WINE (655-9463)

doing?' " when he decided to abandon his 20-year career as a CPA. "But I expect to see a lot of them here."

The Widener graduate (class of 1986) says he decided to go it alone in this venture without partners, although his wife Meg, a logistics planner for Hercules, is helping get things ready for launch.

Hudson says he will not miss his daily train commute to Baltimore, where his last office was located, but he has not totally lost his corporate mind-set. When the doors to Domaine Hudson swing open, Hudson will be working the front of the house, greeting and chatting with guests.

"I see myself as being the facilitator," he says with a grin.

Roger Morris has written about wines for years and regularly visits the winegrowing areas of the world.

Write to him at The News Journal, Box 15505, Wilmington, DE 19850;