

## The Wine Project

The world of wine has a bit of a reputation, one marked by an effete exclusivity that shuns the palette too pedestrian to detect delicate notes of raspberry or wet dog or to decipher “terroir,” the French word that suggests flavor is imparted to wine or food by the region of origin. But Eric Moser, owner of The Wine Project at 663 Laurel St. in San Carlos, has a novel idea: “Wine isn’t something to be afraid of.”

A longtime veteran of the media and online gaming industry, Moser’s idea for his wine bar and restaurant was born out of witnessing his colleagues’ discomfort ordering drinks during business dinners.

“A lot of people in the gaming industry, they love wine, but they don’t know how to order it,” said Moser. “My concept was to create a wine bar for people who aren’t connoisseurs, but a place where aficionados can still discover something new.”

As an East Coaster who discovered his own love for wine after relocating to California and travelling internationally, Moser knew he needed a strategy to remove wine’s mysterious veil. The first step, he decided, is to serve labels that capture the true essence of their varietals.

Not sure what it means when someone calls a wine a “true” Napa cab, or a “pinot-y” pinot? Moser has that covered. In fact, he even takes the oenophile education one step further with his introductory flights, like the “Red for Beginners.” Offering a pinot noir, syrah and cabernet sauvignon, this sampling gives guests the chance to sip, taste, and compare the three oft-poured red varietals. For the person who has always been confounded by chardonnay, or curious about California



Eric Moser

wines, there are flights to help decipher those too: Aspects of Chardonnay and Alt California, respectively.

But tasting is only half the battle. Who hasn’t nodded while a sommelier describes a wine, but deep down is convinced the person is, in fact, speaking a foreign language? That won’t happen at The Wine Project.

“Relatability is really our guidepost,” Moser said. “People might pretend to know what someone means when they talk about ‘malolactic acid’, but really, they’re lost. Instead, we use words that can be understood, like ‘soft,’ ‘buttery,’ or ‘crisp,’ to describe our wines.”

The emphasis on relatability carries through in the food menu, as well. “Of-tentimes at a wine bar, the food takes a back seat. I wanted to do something different, but something that made sense, and fit with our focus of relatability, of accessibility.” The perfect match was comfort food, but with a twist. “Of course,

we have the prerequisite olives, cheeses and charcuterie, but I wanted comfort food that was unique and robust.”

To bring his menu ideas to life, Moser brought on chef Michael Reining. “He’s been a great partner. He has really helped refine the menu, and take it to a whole new level.”

That new level includes mix-and-match sliders, with options such as pork belly with an onion-bacon jam or shiitake mushroom with roasted bell peppers. There are hearty entrees like the Mac & Four Cheeses, which is kicked up with blue cheese, parmesan and Swiss, and pairs beautifully with the buttery yet complex Hindsight Chardonnay.

Or perhaps the Pork Belly Chilaquiles paired with a glass of Urban Legend syrah strikes the fancy. The pairings are mere suggestions, of course, and venturing out on one’s own is encouraged. Not only is the staff on hand to help guide, but each wine poured is assigned a sliding scale that depicts its level of body, alcohol, tannin and acid.

Though Moser’s menus embrace exploration and comfort food, when it comes to pouring his own glass, he will always have a soft spot for the louder, California wines. “I learned to taste wine in California, so I’ll always love the big, bold Napa reds, or a buttery chardonnay.”

His French wife, Anne, however, has strictly opposing views. “She grew up on the softer, more delicate pinot noirs and sauvignon blancs.” A house divided, perhaps, but the two have found a compromise. “I suppose our happy medium is to drink Rhone blends together,” Moser chuckled. Not sure what a Rhone blend is? No worries—there’s an Intro to France flight, too. **C**