

# THE MIRROR *Weekend Section*

## Vino 100 Opens Customers' Palates To Great, Affordable Wines

BY NANCY GAGNET  
MIRROR REPORTER

Near the back of a narrow, well-kept store, a small group gathers to sample a variety of wines.

"This is nice. I could serve this as one of my deck wines," declared Shawn Chowdhary, sipping the Macon-Fuissé Chardonnay.

"Look at that; look how it hits your glass with such beautiful color," wine expert George Burk agreed while swirling the amber-colored French wine. "That's nice."

It's evident that Burk is passionate about wine, and his passion prompted him to join forces with his longtime girlfriend Diana Whitman to open Vino 100, a wine shop that caters to those with very little knowledge of wine as well as seasoned wine connoisseurs.

"I love this place," Burk said, "and our customers absolutely love coming here."

He is confident that those walking in his store for the first time will not feel intimidated by what he refers to as the "snooty wine guy."

"That's not what we're about at all," he said. "Wine is so social, and we love the interaction with our customers."

As the group casually sips flavors of red and white, Burk explains the science and intricacies of the drink to help them enjoy it more.

"I thought it was pretty cool," said Gina Kaufman,

who stopped at the store for the first time to buy a bottle of wine for a special anniversary celebration. "I learned a lot."

Burk and Whitman opened the store a year ago after spotting an ad for the franchise in a wine magazine.

"We were into wine and we loved the look and we loved the fact that it was a relatively new franchise," Burk explained.

Currently, it is the only Vino 100 store in the Toledo area, with the next closest location in Columbus.

"The theory behind the name is 100 great wines for \$25.00 or less, hence the name Vino 100," Burk said.

The shop stocks wines that come from small vineyards, those not normally found in grocery stores.

"We look for wines that aren't saturated in the market," Whitman explained.

Along both walls of the shop, the wines are clearly labeled with the name, origin, description and a taste barometer that shows the depth of flavor and body.

Whitman says the white wines are arranged from sweet to dry, and red wines are set up from fruity to dry. The store also stocks ice wines, dessert wines and sparkling wines.

Greeting each customer who comes through the door, Whitman and Burk work hard to educate their clients and to find the wine

flavor that best suits them.

"We want to educate the public and try to help people find their flavor," Whitman said.

With no other employees, the two remain dedicated to getting to know their customers, many of whom, like Chowdhary, they've come to know on a first-name basis.

"I really do like the fact that George and Diana are so knowledgeable about wine," Chowdhary said.

He's been a regular customer since the store opened, and says he enjoys the opportunity to sample the wines.

"There's no pressure to buy the wines. I really like the laid back atmosphere," he said.

The store offers many services relating to the wine industry to make it as easy as possible for consumers to shop for wine.

One such service is an online "find a wine" service for anyone searching for a particular wine.

By typing in wine information, the store will locate the wine and contact you when it arrives.

Charity tastings for non-profit organizations are also available. A nonprofit group can raise money by purchasing the wine, setting the price for the tastings, and keeping 10 percent of the wine sales during the event.

Other opportunities include "Wine and Women," an event that takes place each month and features a local woman in business.

Throughout the hour-long networking event, the business owner has the opportunity to highlight her services to those in the store.

In addition to wine, the store also features a variety of unique items and gift cards. Those hosting a party or social event may also hire Burk to lend his wine expertise to guests.

Burk believes that the popularity of wine is just beginning to unfold in this area, and he hopes to ride the wave as it evolves.

"I don't think Northwest Ohio has come close to peaking its interest in wine. It's really just beginning to explode," he said.

Wine tastings are available Monday through Saturday from 11:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. The cost is \$2.00 per person and includes four two-ounce tastings.

Vino 100 is located at 3355 Briarfield Blvd. in the Promenade West shopping plaza. More information can also be found on the Web at [vino100maumee.com](http://vino100maumee.com) or by calling (419) 866-8466.



Customers (from left) Danielle Keyes and Shawn Chowdhary taste wines with Vino 100 owners Diana Whitman and George Burk. Wine tastings at Vino 100 allow customers to socialize, sample and learn about wine before buying. MIRROR PHOTOS BY NANCY GAGNET



Diana Whitman and George Burk followed their passion for wine when they opened Vino 100, a wine shop that features 100 wines for \$25.00 and under.

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