

## Martin's Wines downtown showcases exotic vintages

By DEREK BROUWER Independent Record

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Thom Bridge/ Independent Record- Steven Aagenes(left) and Martin Richard(right) pose in Martin's Wines, their newly opened store in the walking mall. Most of the wine found in the store costs \$10-\$20 and is a little different than your typical wine selection. "The main thing is, we like the obscure. We love finding obscure wines from obscure regions and showing them to people," said Richard.

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**M**artin's Wines is a wine store for the adventurous.

The shop opened this spring on Helena's Downtown Walking Mall, and its owners are proud to say they probably don't stock cases of your favorite wine.

They will order it, of course, but not before encouraging you to try, say, a bottle of Pinot noir made in France with a bicycle pump.

"The main thing is: We like the obscure. We love finding obscure wines from obscure regions and showing them to people," co-owner Martin Richard said.

Richard, the store's connoisseur, has spent a lifetime studying and enjoying wine. He has taught wine courses or symposiums at four universities, owned a restaurant in Michigan and currently writes wine columns for the Helena Vigilante newspaper.

Introducing customers to a wider world of wine is Richard's version of retirement, he said.

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He partnered with longtime friend and local musician Steven Aagenes to create the store, which is located in the space previously occupied by Saunders Jewelry for the past 25 years.

The pair said they are excited to do business downtown and hope to find creative ways to bring energy to the area.

Finding the space “was such a huge relief,” Aagenes said. “It was very, very perfect.”

The front door is always propped open, and outdoor speakers play New Orleans Jazz or the occasional Black Sabbath album into the open air. Richard isn’t afraid to invite passersby to stop in.

Inside, the owners have created a boutique that reflects their own personalities. For example, guitars are mounted on the wall, and Richard’s photography hangs below. They have also preserved gallery space for local pottery and other arts.

“That was part of our vision. We definitely want artists in our store,” Aagenes said.

And, of course, there’s the wine itself, each bottle of which is presented as its own work of art.

The selection aims to be sophisticated but not pretentious. Richard and Aagenes stock a sampling from wine regions across the globe, but with an average price from \$10-\$20 per bottle. They taste every variety they sell.

The curious customer will be rewarded, Richard said, as each wine is a reflection of its particular origin.

“The great thing about wine is it transmits that sense of place,” he said.

Richard means it literally, noting the more than 1,300 varieties of commercial wine grapes, of which most people drink only a handful.

“Most Americans have no idea of the repertoire of tastes and flavors that are out there,” he said.

In each wine is a complex set of aromas and flavors born from its particular grape and production process. That history is captured in the bottle and its aroma, Richard said.

When we drink wine, the aroma interacts with our personal sense of smell and our own memories, according to Richard, which makes each experience unique.












By selling distinct wines, Richard and Aagenes want to help customers access such “vinformation.”

“There’s the story, there’s the information in this wine, tightly wound into this bottle,” Aagenes said.

In simpler terms, Richard said, “We try to teach grownups how to play with their food.”

Martin’s Wines, 21 N. Last Chance Gulch Suite No. 101, is open Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, visit

**[www.martinswines.com](http://www.martinswines.com)**.

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