

MORE ON NEW YORK'S CITY WINERY

NOT LONG AGO THE neighborhood around Varick and Spring streets in New York's Greenwich Village was a fairly gritty place. Today it is a thriving part of the lower downtown scene and much



KELLY J. HAYES

of the credit for that that transformation must go to advent of City Winery and its' founder Michael Dorf. A music impresario with a passion for wine, Dorf had a vision half a decade ago that culminated in a winery, restaurant and music

venue that has helped transform a neighborhood.

City Winery is many things to many people. "If you knew Michael, you'd know how he thinks and all this would all make sense," says Stephanie Johnson, City Winery's wine director.

"He's the kind of guy who can come up with a bunch of ideas and keep them all at the front of his mind at the same time."

There are indeed a "bunch of ideas" at work in City Winery, a low-slung, single-story cabernet colored building hiding under an awning that fronts Varick Street for half a block. I came for the winery. That is, City Winery is first and foremost a place where people can come and use the facilities to make wine with grapes imported from all over the world.

But the night I was there "The Yardbirds", or a many times removed version of such, was headlining the main stage of the very attractive music venue. At the same time diners were perusing a world-class wine list in the upscale restaurant that sits between the music venue and the barrel room. And, in the fermentation room, or what is

actually the wine making part of City Winery, a group of young hipsters from a dotcom startup were enjoying a wine tasting event

Like I said, a bunch of ideas. But they seem to work together. In fact, the concept has proved so successful that a second City Winery has just opened in Chicago on Randolph Street. I would recommend a stop for anyone who is interested in good wine and good music to either venue.

At the heart of City Winery is the idea of bringing grapes to the people and giving them the tools to make their own wines. Since the people live in cities that is where Dorf thought it best to build his winery. This could be called a custom crush facility for the masses.

The basics are that City Winery sells consumers "Barrel Ownership". A client buys a "barrel" of wine *continues on page 20*



City Winery in New York's Greenwich Village.



Check out City Winery's blog to read about the winery's recovery after Hurricane Sandy at www.citywineryblog.com.

and makes decisions on what kinds of wines they want to make. City Winery supplies the grapes, helps the client through the sorting, crush and maceration. They supply the oak barrels for the aging, guide them

PINOT NOIR FROM THE HYLAND VINEYARD IN OREGON'S WILLAMETTE VALLEY, CABERNET SAUVIGNON FROM LARRY BETTINELLI IN YOUNTVILLE IN NAPA AND RIESLING FROM THE FINGER LAKES OF NEW YORK. THE GRAPES ARE FLOWN IN COLD AND DELIVERED TO THE BACK DOOR OF THE WINERY, JUST LIKE THEY WOULD BE IN THEIR HOME REGION.

through blending decisions and provide bottles with custom labels. Soup to nuts or, rather, grapes to glass. First comes the selection of grapes.

Each fall harvest the winery buys an allotment of fruit from the premium grape growing regions in the country. Pinot Noir from the Hyland Vineyard in Oregon's Willamette Valley, Cabernet Sauvignon from Larry Bettinelli in Yountville in Napa and Riesling from the Finger Lakes of New York. The grapes are flown in cold and delivered to the back door of the winery, just like they would be in their home region.

Led by City Winery's resident winemaker Frenchman David Lecomte, clients can feel the fruit as they hand sort the grapes if they wish. They are taught about the maceration

and fermentation process and allowed to select, based on their investment, the specific kinds of oak that they wish to age their wines in. They can visit the winery and taste as their wines mature and can design labels for each of their 252 bottles or 21 cases that will result from the effort.

The cost of the program is dependent upon the grapes, materials and customer involvement but range from about \$5000 to \$12,000 a barrel, or \$20 to \$45 a bottle. There is also a "Barrel Share program where one can play for \$1800 and receive three cases of wine.

But it should be noted that while one is getting wine for their investment, what they are really buying is an education and an experience. There are some clients who come to City Winery with a solid understanding of the process who simply want to avail themselves of the facilities and the chance to make

their wine vision a reality. But others are there, starting from scratch, just getting a feel for the alchemy that is the wine winemaking process.

Either way those who become part of the City Winery scene have a chance to soak up the sounds of acts like John Hiatt, Joan Osborne and Allen Toussaint, sip world wines from Leeuwin Estate, Bodega Catena and JL Chave, and enjoy a crispy flatbread with it all.

An eclectic mix to be sure. Perhaps my bartender, Jimmy D. summed it up best when he yelled at me over a lead guitar solo during the Yardbird's classic Shapes of Things, "No winery rocks harder!"

Well said.

Kelly J. Hayes lives in the soon-to-be-designated appellation of Old Snowmass with his wife, Linda, and a black Lab named Vino. He can be reached at malibukj@wineink.com.