



Looking to learn more about wine? Try these Twin Cities classes

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Learning opportunities abound for those interested in all things related to this beverage.

By Bill Ward Special to the Star Tribune

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I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Wine is the ultimate lifelong learning topic. On the one hand, the more you learn, the more you realize how little you know, at once a humbling and inspiring feeling. On the other hand, you can pursue all manner of directions — or not — without any pressure to be a completist but with delightful paths along the way.

And there's absolutely no better time to pursue edifying experiences, with more and better wine-education opportunities than ever before. Just as children are headed "back to school," all manner of classes, events and venues afford near-endless options for honing our wine skills and knowledge at this time of year.

Two stellar teachers, each enthusiastic and engaging, are responsible for much of this font of knowledge-sharing. Jason Kallsen runs Twin Cities Wine Education, which offers 150 classes a year in six locations. Nikki Erpelding operates Vine Lab Wine & Spirits Academy, conducting courses for all levels of interest. Both will oversee weeklong deep dives into the wondrous world of wine in September (more on them below).

Twin Cities Wine Education: It's grown steadily in recent years, with Shar Peterson (a graduate of one of Erpelding's professional courses) coming on board for frequent "foundation of wine" talks on topics such as oak and acidity as well as "Wine After Work" sessions that usually focus on a region or type of wine; these run around \$35.

Kallsen, whose ebullience is seriously contagious, puts on a monthly "Ultimate Intro to Wine" that he describes as "really good foundational stuff, including descriptions and being accurate in talking about wine in a restaurant." Those classes run around \$40, and more intermediate and advanced offerings such as "Wine Rivers of the World" and "Aged Oregon Gems" range from \$50 to \$90.

A lot of these classes fill up quickly, so getting on the e-mail list at twincitieswine.com is well advised.

Provided Jason Kallsen is the founder of Twin Cities Wine Education.

Vine Lab Wine & Spirits Academy: There's also a looming deadline (Sept. 7) for Erpelding's courses, including a Wine Pro 2019 "boot camp" that might have wider appeal than Level 2 and 3 Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) curriculum.

And her "Wine Education Week" sessions are bargains for as little as \$15, at locals including St. Paul College, France 44 and 7 Vines Winery in Dellwood. Topics range from deciphering wine labels and demystifying Italian wines to "A Tale of Three Frontenacs" and a "Climate and Flavor Workshop." Check out vinelabwine.com for more details.

Twin Cities Wine Education: Later in the month, this group's semiannual "Wine Geek Week" focuses on a once-overrated, now-underrated wine region, Australia. There's a \$50 grand tasting (highly recommended) at the University Club in St. Paul on Sept. 24 and classes

throughout the week. For details, see twincitieswine.com.

France 44: Also in September, France 44 will launch its fall series of wine/spirits/etc. classes with a Sept. 17 look at the emerging Republic of Georgia on Sept. 17. Of particular interest is “A Wine and Food Experience From the Wild West Coast to the Bold North” with vintner Page Knudsen and masterful cook Beth Dooley on Oct. 8. Go to france44.com for details.

Surdyk's: Down the road, Surdyk's will start up its classes in winter (surdyks.com), and the estimable Desta Klein of Meritage restaurant in St. Paul will conduct her semiannual seven-week course (\$350; registration opens Dec. 1 at meritage-stp.com/wineschool).

Get thee to Hopkins

The other great way to learn about wine is to sample as many as possible, preferably in small doses. A great place to do that is the newly opened Vine Room wine bar (the Vine Room, 756 Mainstreet, Hopkins, 952-300-3534, thevineroom.co) in beautiful downtown Hopkins. The brainchild of Drew and Ali Hanson (she's another Erpelding protégée), this bright, vibrant space has a stupendous selection of interesting and accessible wines.

Flights with three wines offer up a particularly swell chance to discover an array of flavors, but customers could throw a dart at the two-page wine list and hit a winner. Bonus points for having the terrific Field Recordings Chenin Blanc on tap. This gem of a wine bar is a worthy successor to Toast Wine Bar in the North Loop, which closed a few years back.

Great vinous get-together

Yet another schooling opportunity is here with the ever-growing Minnesota Wine Country building at the State Fair (1271 Underwood St., across from the Ag/Hort Building).

Actually, for some folks, this is an “unlearning” experience: Anyone who had less-than-stellar encounters with Minnesota wine in the past needs to see how much real progress has been made. Nine of the state's best wineries are represented, available by the glass (\$8) or in flights of three (\$11).

Kallsen, Erpelding, local wine consultant Leslee Miller and Winehaven owner Kyle Peterson will be among those making presentations at 3:30 p.m. daily (Aug. 22-Sept. 2), and there's music at night.

And of course, charcuterie on a stick all day long.

Fine (wine)-tuning

Those who already know a lot about wine — and don't mind shelling out good money — also could “find discovery” these days at Osteria I Nonni (981 Sibley Memorial Hwy., Lilydale, 651-905-1081, osteriainonni.com). There, some of the world's best wines are available for

only \$20 more than the retail price at the adjacent store, Sunfish Cellars.

The available bottles are exemplary, featuring top brands from California (Harlan, Shafer Hillside Select), Burgundy (Armand Rousseau, Comte de Vogue), the Rhône (Jean-Louis Chave, E. Guigal Côte-Rôtie La Mouline), Spain (La Rioja Alta, López de Heredia), Italy (Giacomo Conterno, Quintarelli) and Australia (Penfolds Grange). I doubt there's ever been a more stout wine list in the Upper Midwest.

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