

Learn a lot in hour at your local wine shop

By CLARKE CANFIELD
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PORTLAND, Maine

Phillip Holt swirls a small bit of white wine in his glass and looks for the "legs," or what he calls "curtains," that cling to the side.

He sniffs the aroma, takes a sip, holds it on the front of his tongue, and registers the different sensations. He then writes down his observations on a clipboard and compares them to the description on a handout.

It's the first Thursday of the month, a day when Holt can often be found sampling a half-dozen wines at The Clown, a downtown wine shop in Portland, Maine. Each month, more than 100 people, and sometimes as many as 200, attend the store's evening wine tastings.

They're all part of a growing trend, but it isn't just upscale wine shops that offer opportunities for a little Wine 101. A nearby community college has a non-credit wine appreciation class.

Even the Hannaford supermarket chain last year began holding monthly wine tastings at dozens of stores in New England.

Per capita wine consumption in the United States has grown by a third since 1995, and as Americans drink more wine, more of them are also seeking out seminars, classes and tastings like this one. Some come to The Clown's tastings



A customer samples a glass of wine at the monthly wine tasting at The Clown in Portland, Maine. Such shops are good places to learn about wine, customers say.

mainly to socialize with friends and partake, while others are here to learn.

Holt keeps notes on his observations and refers to them when he buys wine.

"I feel competent," Holt, 68, said.

"From my perspective, it makes me a smarter buyer." He even likes pairing wines and soft cheeses from the same regions because, he says, the same soil

is shared by both the grapevines and the cows that provide milk for the cheese.

Karen Ledew, 48, has been coming to these tastings for six years now, mostly to be with friends and enjoy herself over a little bit of wine. "I'm not interested in becoming a wine expert," she said.

But over time, she's learned her share about wine and has no trouble distin-

guishing a chardonnay from a pinot grigio from a sauvignon blanc. She recently hosted a wine-guessing party at her home to see if people could identify wines by taste without seeing the labels.

"I love wine," Ledew said. "And I'm always looking to learn something new."

Jonathan Dietz, wine manager at The Clown, said each tasting is different. One might focus on a region, another on a certain winery, another on a particular distributor. January's event featured seven wines that cost less than \$20 a bottle and scored 90 points or higher from the Wine Spectator, Robert Parker's Wine Advocate or Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar.

The Clown events are loud affairs in a low-ceilinged wine cellar. The samples are small; you're unlikely to find any drunks here. Everybody is given a handout with detailed descriptions of the featured wines, and Dietz and other pros are on hand to pour and answer questions.

At any given tasting, people might learn about a wine region, a particular winery or what a wine tastes like that's described as "peppery, with vibrant scents of dark cherry, cassis and tobacco." At the least, they learn which wines they like, or don't.

Most guests try a few samples. Many buy a bottle or two, and for those who want to educate themselves, "the potential's there to learn a bit," Dietz said.

For more serious learners, there are actual courses. Southern Maine Community College in nearby South Portland offered a wine appreciation class last fall that was filled to capacity.

The seven-week course introduced people to the history of wine, how it's made, the difference between New World and Old World types, how to pair wine with food and the like. Students learned about "terroir," a French term that loosely means "sense of place" and refers to the cumulative effect that the climate, soil, grapes, sun's angle, wine-making savvy and other factors have on wine. The goal of the class was to make people feel more comfortable with wine, and less intimidated by it.

"The reason for the increase in wine education opportunities is because America is becoming more of a wine-drinking country," said Brian Dorsk, who teaches the class.

Nobody knows for sure just how many places offer wine tastings and classes. But nobody disputes that they've been on the rise over the past decade, said Richard Brandes, editor of Beverage Dynamics trade magazine.

"It's become part of the merchandising at wine shops that are promoting wine as a healthy lifestyle choice," Brandes said. Consumers seem to like them, and retailers have learned that tastings can boost sales and create customer loyalty.

• Honor

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an enemy yell: "Go kill the GI!"

When the Viet Cong started toward Davis' unit, he manned a 105 mm howitzer, which fired 18,000 "beehive darts" with each shell.

As soon as he fired, Davis and his sergeant were hit by a rocket. Davis remembers seeing the sergeant disappear into the darkness.

Davis awoke a while later, although he's not sure how long he was unconscious. He had been thrown from his post at the howitzer and landed half in and half out of a foxhole.

The blast had temporarily damaged his eardrums.

"I couldn't hear nothing, but I could see all these pretty lights," Davis said.

The lights were ammunition tracers used for better nighttime firing. During the Vietnam War, American tracers were red, and the enemy's were white, blue and green. Davis saw all four colors flying above him as he gained consciousness.

As he slowly realized the colors meant danger, he started to feel a stinging and thought he was lying among fire ants. He had actually been struck with more than 30 "darts" from the howitzer he once manned.

The stinging sensation awoke Davis. "I didn't realize my own guys had shot me," he said. "It's OK. It saved my life."

Davis resumed the fight. After running out of ammunition, he saw a howitzer with most of its parts burning and hoped he could get at least one round off.

When he couldn't find any bags of powder still intact, he gathered loose powder, along with other components needed to fire it, and moved the howitzer to aim at the enemy.

"Normally, it takes four or five guys to move the howitzer," he said. "One young man can do it if properly motivated."

Davis fired. The weapon flew several feet in the air and came down on top of him. He would later learn the howitzer's fall had broken his back and crushed his ribs.

After firing more rounds, Davis ran out of ammunition and even fired a "propaganda" shell, which contained only leaflets.

Then he saw three GIs on the other side of a nearby river who needed help.

Davis had swum in a river near his home most of his life, but his injuries rendered him unable to cross the water. He found part of an air mattress to help him get across the river.

He reached three wounded soldiers, one who had been shot in the head and was taken for dead by the other men.

But Davis refused to leave him. "You don't leave a brother," Davis said. "If that'd been me, I wouldn't want to be left there."

Davis slung the man over his back and carried the other two men, one under each arm. All four were able to cross the river. They tried to blend in with fallen soldiers when enemies passed by.

The next morning, only 12 of the 42

Americans were left standing. Davis helped handle triage, deciding who had the best chance to live and sending those men to safety on evacuation helicopters.

Davis' worst nightmares after the war were marked by images of the faces of men he put on the helicopters, he said. The final soldier Davis helped evacuate was the man who had suffered the head wound.

He passed out after he put the young man on the helicopter, and others loaded Davis on the same aircraft.

His efforts recognized by the Medal of Honor made the difference between life and death for many soldiers, one in particular.

The man Davis refused to leave behind is alive and well, living in Kansas.

• Comeback

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car trunk and helped other volunteers shovel snow off the walks.

Thinking nothing of her servant attitude, she humbly explained, "Somebody might be

coming to church today for the first time and bring their little ones through this door."

Go Mary. CBS Sports reported one way Colts quarterback Peyton Manning persevered through the stress in the final few minutes of the AFC Championship game:

"I said a little prayer on that last drive," Manning said. "I

don't know if you're supposed to pray for stuff like that, but I said a little prayer."

Go Colts. Even better: Go God.

Janet Hommel Mangas, the third of seven children, grew up on the east side of Greenwood. She now resides in the Center Grove area with her husband and three daughters.

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