

A new approach to wine

Tempe vintner gets the buyer involved

by *Lisa Nicita* - Apr. 29, 2008 12:56 PM
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When Kate Portanova of Scottsdale wanted to take part in a formal tasting at a winery, she didn't have to drive to [California](#) or southern Arizona.

She made her way to a business park in Tempe, near Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. She sipped a few glasses of Cabernet Sauvignon in an office-turned-urban-winery that sits next to a dentist's office.

Portanova is one of about 50 people who have bought into PurVine, a rare approach to winemaking that asks wine lovers to commit to more than just a bottle or case of wine. The wine is sold by the barrel or fractions of a barrel, meaning dozens of bottles of wine.

Portanova, 30, loved the wine from Stagecoach Vineyard, one of the many vineyards sampled at the tasting this month. Good thing, because she will take home a half-barrel of the wine once it's bottled later this year.

That's about 144 bottles. She has room for it, too. Her loft has a wine cellar, and she has access to two other storage facilities.

"I drink wine 24/7, pretty much," she said, adding that she owns a retail shop, Arcadia Fine Wine in Scottsdale. This batch, however, is for her personal consumption. Although it will bottle its first harvest later this year, PurVine was started in November 2006 by Ken Losch, a principal partner in Avenue Communities, which is developing

Centerpoint [Condominiums](#) in Tempe.

A smaller version of the PurVine headquarters will open at the [condo](#) project this November, but PurVine didn't want to wait until then to start making wine.

PurVine is a fully functional winery, minus the vineyard. The \$1 million facility is split into thirds, with an intimate tasting room in front, a cooler stocked with barrels of aging wine in the center and a warehouse of 20 large metal tanks in the back.

Winemaker John Allen Burtner, a Napa Valley veteran, visits the California vineyards that supply PurVine with grapes. Once the grapes are delivered, they're cleaned and destemmed within two days of being picked. The wine sits in French-oak barrels for 18 to 24 months before being bottled.

"This is novel," Burtner said of PurVine's setup. "As far as I can tell, this is unique."

Not only do buyers have to commit to a hefty supply of wine, a \$540 participant fee is levied. Because of that, PurVine isn't a spot where wine drinkers can pop in and sample

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the latest crop. It's by appointment only.

Participants can watch and take part in the winemaking process. They can do everything from help unload the grapes to bottle the wine.

"It's your wine," Losch said. "It has your fingerprint on it."

The 2006 harvest is expected to produce about 2,800 cases of wine. The 2007 harvest will double that.

Burtner is in the process of choosing the vineyard for the 2008 harvest.

Losch has high hopes for PurVine's future. For one, he knows his family will be drinking wine he had a hand in making for years to come.

"It'll be our staple family-dinner wine," he said. "We'll keep a whole bunch and drink it 10 years from now."

He hopes others will be doing the same.

"I think we'll create and develop an incredible, high-end cult wine," he said.

Reach the reporter at lisa.nicita@arizonarepublic.com or 602-444-8546.

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