

WHAT'S HOT: MIAMI WINE BARS

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By Simone Boyce

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Just as no two Cabs taste the same, each Miami wine venue offers a distinct flavor—spectacle, art, intimacy—easily distinguishing one from another. Miami's wine bars and bistros welcome wine lovers of all kinds, from casual drinkers to expert connoisseurs, balancing hip acidity with smooth sophistication.

Italian wine aficionados flock to **Cibo Wine Bar** on Miami's storied Miracle Mile for family style meals and a touch of spectacle. Antiquated bricks and bottles line the walls as modern décor meets old world Italy in this enormous eatery. Their extensive selection of over 3,000 bottles of international varietals is matched only by the sheer size of the place. And for the wow-factor, a floating "wine angel," suspended from a trapeze, sifts through the two-story glass cellar to retrieve your selection. The bottles bode well when paired with traditional Italian eats from the Sorrento region and over 16 different pizzas, all made with homemade bread.

The **Blue Piano** stands out as the endearing gem of Miami's bohemian Buena Vista strip. In 2010, three friends birthed a super simple concept: a place where people can listen to music and drink wine. In fact, Blue Piano won't open unless they've got Miami's hottest rising stars making sweet melodies in their cozy back corner. Their charming menu offers 60 plus wines from South Africa, Argentina, Italy, Spain and France, each thoughtfully described in detail. Americana tapas, such as Chester Cheetah Mac & Cheese, Slip & Sliders and Oozey Goozey Brie, sooth the soul as smooth jazz snaps in the background. Blue Piano also boasts a broad craft beer selection. Sam Adams is the most basic draught in sight, with rare brews like Banana Bread Ale stealing the limelight. Dimly lit and blue like jazz, this stripped down watering hole doesn't disappoint for an intimate evening with good company and unassuming libations.

Over 600 Spanish wines decorate Xixon's niche cellar and tasting room. **Xixon** (she-SHONE) promises a taste of Spain in every tapas plate and glass of Tempranillo. But who wants to peruse a daunting wine list when you can browse the bottles yourself in their walk-in storeroom? Whether you're after a reasonable glass of Rioja or a \$900 Reserva, Xixon invites patrons to experience each wine-producing region of Spain for themselves, with hands on selection and 32 bottles available for tasting atop oak barrel tables. Choose from four distinct dining areas: a mezzanine for large parties, a tapas bar, the Vinoteca wine lounge, and

an outside terrace. Pair an elegantly aged Artadi Viñas de Gain with traditional sautéed garlic shrimp and, suddenly, Spain feels closer to home.

A Hip Wine Hub

Industrial chic meets a French/Mediterranean food fusion at downtown Miami's **Bin No. 18**. Artsy types and young professionals unwind at this hip wine hub with a glass of Gouguenheim Malbec, some traditional Italian tablas and one very famous sandwich. The Cooking Channel lauded Bin No. 18's unconventional open-faced Cuban sandwich on national television, and rightly so. Topped with melted Brie cheese, fig sauce and roasted pork, this remix of a local favorite will blow your mind. Bin No. 18 attracts working locals and travelers to its approachably swanky ambiance with irresistible specials like Half-Off-Wine-List-Tuesdays, late night happy hours, free champagne for ladies on Wednesdays and six dollar bowls of Mediterranean mussels on Mondays.



Cibo Wine Bar



Schnebly Redland's Winery

Miami's Garden of Eden, **Schnebly Redland's Winery**, prides itself in unique vino made from the finest tropical fruits. Patrons are invited to stroll the grounds under tiki-covered corridors and watch serene waterfalls cascade over jutting rocks in this Polynesian paradise. But leave any hint of pretentious wine prowess in Napa Valley: this vineyard's sweet varietals should not be taken too seriously. Notes of lychee, guava, carambola, coconut, mango or avocado pleasure the palate with every swish of Schnebly's wine. Taste a flight of tropical flat wines, bubbles or sweet desert wine for around ten dollars; and take home a free wine

glass as a parting gift. For a real party, roll up to Schnebly's on a Friday or Saturday for a packed house, live jams and plenty of heavenly bevies.

Bomb Shelter Chic

Remember when bomb shelters were all the rage? **Kork Wine and Cheese** is bringing it back. Kork transformed a product of the Cuban missile crisis into a venue that gives a whole new meaning to "getting bombed." Fitted with all the necessities—solid staff, comfortable seating, rich wood infrastructure and plenty of sustenance—Kork Wine and Cheese shelters even the most bombarded businessmen and women after a long day at the office. Between live tunes, craft beers, happy hours and over 5,000 bottles to choose from, you can't go wrong retreating to Kork's sexy cavern.

The **Wine Depot** is Miami's one-stop wine shop. Voted Best Wine Store of 2011 by the Miami New Times, this gourmet marketplace, wine bar and bistro allows beach-goers to stock up or simmer down. Brimming with over 400 bottles, this loft-style wine warehouse accommodates every occasion. For a casual outing, plop down on a high-top with a bottle and tapas. For business dinners, munch on Mediterranean bites in a courtyard under shady palms. And to dine like the Real Housewives of Miami, head to the chic glass cellar for flutes of high-priced bubbles. Almost as diverse as the venue itself, **Bistro 555** is the Wine Depot's on site eatery. The menu combines classic French fare with fresh and raw cuisine like salmon tartar. Purveyors of one-of-a-kind products and an equally unique experience, The Wine Depot & Bistro 555 has galvanized its place in the Miami wine scene.

Other popular wine bars are **W Wine Bar and Bistro** in Miami's up-and-coming Midtown neighborhood, **Cavas Wine Tasting Room** in Brickell and **Pearl Champagne Lounge** on South Beach. A decade-old tradition worth noting is the renowned **United Way Miami Wine and Food Festival** occurring each April. Every year, top sommeliers, wine makers, brewers, prestigious chefs and other tastemakers come together for one jam-packed weekend of tasting and toasts to benefit United Way programs. Plan your trip around this festival and experience the most decadent culinary culture Miami has to offer.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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I'm a Miami local with a passion for all things MIA. My aim is to give you a slice of life, Miami-style, in every post. From our beautiful beaches to our sexy boutique hotels, Miami is a tropical wonderland with something for everyone. For more hot happenings, visit www.MiamiandBeaches.com.

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