



EJ DROESSLER ASSISTS CUSTOMERS AT HIS NEW SHOP IN THE MILLWORK DISTRICT



SAMPLE A VARIETY OF WINE WITH A FLIGHT

EJ's Wine Shop & Tasting Room

By S. Eliot Steuer

Walking into EJ's Wine Shop & Tasting Room for the first time, I didn't know what to expect. The world of wine is often seen as elitist, where a decent bottle costs a day's wage, and the shopkeeper makes it a sport to look down on anyone with less than a wine sommelier's knowledge. This is not that shop, and owner EJ Droessler is not that shopkeeper. It took me less than a minute to spot Droessler, his enthusiasm preceded him. I watched as he buzzed around helping a client choose a selection of unique labels, with a clear passion for the art of wine and wine making, and with an innate ability to engage with patrons on a relatable level.

"Today's been a great example of how we do things differently. That gentleman just bought a case of wine and thanked me for helping him out. That's what I love to do, ask customers what style they like, and to work together with them" said Droessler. "I bring my knowledge, but it's a collaboration."

Located in shared space with Wayfarer Coffee in the Millwork District, EJ's opens after Wayfarer closes, utilizing the space to its fullest capacity, a model rarely seen

outside of big cities. A retail-driven wine market and tasting lounge, EJ's is committed to providing quality, handpicked wines at a fair price with the goal of carrying unique labels unavailable locally.

"If I can get that customer who is used to the \$90 bottle of wine to come in and trust me, I'm confident I will find them an amazing bottle that they will love at a great price point," he said. "Dubuque has often tended towards its cabernet sauvignons and chardonnay, and that's ok, but I want to change the limited scope with what I offer and recommend."

With its eclectic selection, EJ's offers wine flights and wines by the glass so patrons can try new options on site. They also have light snacks to accompany the drinks and feature a selection of local beers on draft and non-alcoholic drink options to enjoy.

Having recently held its grand opening, the shop's hours are Thursday through Saturday 1-8 p.m., and Sunday noon-4:30 p.m., occupying a key time slot that Droessler found was lacking for options.

"Maybe you want to take your favorite book somewhere and relax, but many of our local coffee shops are closed by early afternoon, so the concept of a wine shop where people can come with a book in a relaxing, family-friendly environment has been my goal."

While the bricks-and-mortar location is an idea two years in the making, Droessler's passion began in his early 20s, while he was working in restaurants during college, and continued through a stint with Galena Cellars Vineyard & Winery where he learned the finer points of wine making itself. Described as a passion project, EJ's Wine Shop & Tasting Room "has been in the works for years,"

accelerating after Droessler sold ownership of L.May Eatery, and with his increasing desire to bring a different spin to how wine was being presented and sold locally.

"I remember being in Madison in a wine shop, and I asked for a Virginia wine, because I've been to the state, and they make beautiful wines there. And I was laughed at by the gentleman assisting me. It made me feel like I didn't belong there. I had another experience in Iowa City that was similar, and I told my wife 'This is what I don't want.'"

According to Droessler, the more casual model of his shop is in keeping with a shift in the face of the wine making industry.

"If you look at Italy, wine making has been male dominated for centuries, but now there are an increasing number of talented female wine makers in these old world wine producing countries. I have several labels here that are family produced by husband and wife duos or by female producers. Also, I have many bottles from places you might not think of which are produced domestically and many that are certified organic."

Uniquely, EJ's offers its "WINE NOT? Wine Club," an opportunity for members to discover and enjoy new wines not regularly seen on their shelves, and unique to area retailers. The club features hand-selected wines every month in three-, six-, or 12-month memberships. Members receive a thoughtfully chosen bottle or two, depending on their membership, along with tasting notes, packaged and ready for pickup on the 15th of each month. Members also enjoy a 15% discount on all regular priced items the day of pickup, with exclusive sales and first invitations for club members only.

"I'm enjoying our focus," said Droessler. "And I plan to bring in some educational courses. We're going to do some fun tasting events and bring in local wine makers for people to have an opportunity to know what it takes to make a bottle of wine. I'm really excited to bring this venture to our community." So if you're looking for that unique bottle of wine, in a casual atmosphere, with a selection that's driven by a passion for quality and personalized service, then EJ's Wine Shop & Tasting Room located inside Wayfarer Coffee is your new must see.

For more information and to sign up for the "WINE NOT? Wine Club," visit EJsWineShop.com. ■

EJ's Wine Shop & Tasting Room WAYFARER COFFEE

955 WASHINGTON ST, DUBUQUE, IA
563-590-7615

EJSWINESHOP.COM

Hours: Thu-Sat: 1-8 PM;

Sun: Noon-4:30 PM; Mon-Wed: Closed

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