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| A Journey to Wine Heaven |
| Retail Wine Shop Analysis |
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A Journey to Wine Heaven

On a Friday full of reports, studying, and laundry my friends called me to tell me that I should ditch my choirs and drive around with them. Me, being the ever faithful hardworking student jumped into my car to pick them up. After everyone was accounted for we decide to go to a Minado Sushi Buffet in Long Island. We get there at four o’clock only to find out that the sushi buffet was closed until six o’clock. We all sighed and started to mope back to the car with rumbling stomachs. When we get to our car which was in the middle of a parking lot shopping center my classmate Jennifer Cortez saw Stew Leonard’s. Stew Leonard’s is an importer, distributor, wholesaler of wines and spirits. At that very moment I already knew what she was going to say. After much clawing and dragging she convinced me that I should now be the ever faithful hardworking student and head into this store to do the unconceivable, homework.

As we strolled in the store, the first thing I noticed was that it looked like a warehouse. One of the benefits of this layout is that it is easy to walk around, however the drawback of this format was that a person can easily miss out on great deal. The strength of the store’s layout is that if you know what you are looking for you can find it with ease; though its major flaw is that it is not friendly to clumsy people and simple to lose products via theft or misplacement.

The store has the most customer friendly layout I have ever seen. With all the easy to read signage that contained accurate descriptions of what is in the wine, how it will taste, year, location, and law code (when required) make picking the right wine straightforward, even for a novice. The store’s highlights regions like Italy, France, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Australia, Germany, the U.S., and even local New York wines, with sub-sections like fine wines, house wines, dessert wines, and magnums spread about.

The regions are well organized and easily identified, found mostly by flag and some signage for smaller regions. Starting with Italy, the breakdown of this region was into three groups; the main regions of Tuscany and Piedmont with an additional section for the rest. With its Italian flag over the wines this was a good starting point, as it is placed at the front of the store. France is located is the most divided section with shelves dedicated to five regions. South of France being the biggest, Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhône, and Loire, as well as, outlaying wines around those sections for the rest make-up the majority of French wines. The only region of France not in this section is Champagne. All of the champagnes and sparkling wines are next to each other by the Fine Wines Room. The fine, or expensive, wines are place in a separate room that is heavily monitored and protected with some of the bottles having waxed tops (they felt so good to touch) and tamper devices that make it difficult to steal them. Spanish wines are all located next to each other hosting Argentina as the most abundant with Chilean, Portuguese and Spanish wines close by. All of these regions except Portugal are represented by their flags. The U.S. is split up into different wines sections such as Sauvignon Cabernet, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Chardonnay, Zinfandel, Syrah, Red Blends, and my favorite section ABC (Anything But Chardonnay). Most of the U.S. wines come from California and Washington, but a few local New York wines make their way on to the scene and often steal the show on their own shelf. Australia has a small section that touts some attention with its flag above it with New Zealand nearby on its own dedicated shelf. Unfortunately, my favorite wine region, Germany has the smallest section, but is pretty respectable with its selection of Riesling and Spätburgunder. The dessert wines section contains everything from Sake to Ice wine on its very own shelf. Last but not least the magnums are in a corner by fine wines and the house and boxed wines are places very close to the entrance with prices from five dollars to forty dollars, (Hello, Yellowtail!).

Their variety of wine is quite overwhelming at first, but once you get settled in the only word to describe it is heaven. Even with my modest understanding of wine, there was quite a lot of knowledge floating about, eager to be absorbed. Mind you, I was only looking for things I knew but when I left the store it was with a collection that touts a Dalwhinnie (Highland Scotch), Cozio Amaretto (Cordial), Hypnotiq (Blended Cognac/Vodka), Villa Antinori (IGT, Super Tuscan), an Avignonesi (DOCG, 100% Sangiovese), a Cinzano Asti (Sparkling Wine), Fritz Windisch (Pradikatswein Auslese Riesling), an Affentaler Valley of the Monkey (Qualitswein Spätburgunder), a Luigi Bosca Reserva (Argentina, Mendoza, Maipú, Syrah), Catena (Argentina, Mendoza, Malbec), Alta Vista Premium (Argentina, Mendoza, Torrentes), Piper-Heidsieck (Semi-Dec Champagne, not from Champagne), a Wagner (Ice Wine, Riesling), and a boxed wine that holds four times the amount of a regular bottle, in less the space, by Wineberry holding Chateau Real Martin Perl De Rosé. All of the above wines were given a stamp of approval by the staff, as they take their selection of wine to heart. They not only know the product, they buy it as well and have tasting sessions when new product comes in.

The demeanor of sales assistants on the floor was very friendly and knowledgeable. The store manager, Luigi Amato, also works the floor and is very good at informing his staff of trends and wine knowledge. He is also the leading product salesman. The staff follows his lead and takes part in any and all discussions on the floor. If an associate does not know something, they ask Luigi and he almost always has an answer. Customers are treated like family by associates like Davin; and the cashiers are friendly and helpful, even getting you boxes for your large purchases or nets for your smaller purchases.

With a wide price range on all alcohols ranging from four dollars to $2,300, shoppers of all kinds can come and enjoy their selection. The wines range from four dollars to $800, but you can order more pricey wines through their catalog. Most of the wines that are $500 and up are from Bordeaux and are in the Fine Wines Room. The mean price of wines in this section is about $125.

The store also hosts a variety of added benefits such as upon checkout everyone is offered an opportunity to join the Stew Leonard’s email/mailing list which will get you a catalog with coupons of up to ten percent off your purchase. Being on the list also keeps you informed of wine tasting events. For example, on Saturday, April 13th an event hosting a taste of over 200 wines was held in the store. Correspondingly, the store has restrooms which are helpful for the big tasting events. When there are no grand events, they host smaller daily tastings of favorites from the staff and products that are recommended from their wineries.

Now comes my only complaint or should I say recommendation of improvement. I would suggest is to have some Eiswein on stock. The lack of German Eiswein was a turn off at first, but the staff swiftly suggested a replacement in the dessert wine section from Wagner Vineyards of Finger Lakes, N.Y. They also offered to order anything I wanted, even by case; so I could get my Eiswein, but I would have to wait which is a disappointment for obvious reasons.

The store left me with a feeling of safety, even though the store is open with an easy exit not designed to prevent theft. At first, from a security standpoint that was a problem for me, but there were cameras everywhere, as well as, closed display cases of expensive and popular items. I was impressed by the overall security and tamper bottle top covers that help prevent theft in the Fine Wines Room. With one of those devices on, even if someone was able to steal one of those bottles, they would end up breaking the neck of the bottle which would defeat the purpose of stealing a $250 Bordeaux.

With a family-like environment, the place is operated wonderfully by Luigi and his staff. This setting spills onto the customers, who are also very friendly and helpful as well making it a delightful place to shop. Most of the customers repeat the same advice given to them by staff, so if you here the same thing multiple times, you know why. I definitely give Stew Leonard’s two thumbs up and had I known it was a franchise I would have visited a closer one since Carle Place, N.Y. is a bit far off, but if you have the time I would suggest going to see Luigi and his staff, especially during a wine tasting. You can find Luigi, Davin, or anyone else on staff at 221 Glen Cove Road, Carle Place, NY 11514 and they can be reached at (516) 742-2588. The store has been opened for two years and is quite successful. Thanks to the spirits, and the company I had, it was an overall positive experience and I’ll be head back once I have depleted my collection. Pictures will be posted on Open Lab and YouTube for viewing. I must say that my professor was right; being a student of wine has its advantages and this was one of them. By the way the sushi buffet was delicious and if you want to try out their sister buffet, Nori Nori, in Flushing; I would not object.