

Have Your Wine and Drink It Too at Wine Bazaar

And drink we did — a generous 10 wines from light to dark that displayed quite a chunk of the Alma Valley range.

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March 01, 2018



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Evgenia Kachalova, the energetic and inspiring founder of Wine Bazaar, is often asked how to get into the wine world. It's with good reason — who wouldn't want to devote more time to drinking wine? And while there's no simple answer, it may not require traveling as far as you'd think.

The 45th parallel that has given the South of France its ideal winemaking conditions also passes through the Northern Caucasus and Crimea, lending the region a nearly Mediterranean climate. The Crimean terroir's heritage spans back to the ancient Greeks, who first introduced wine grapes there in apparent approval of the land.

TMT Clubs got a crash course in domestic production by someone who knows it inside and out — Igor Serdyuk, wine expert, journalist, and deputy director at Alma Valley vineyard. We managed to squeeze around our table at Wine Bazaar's newest location on Sadovaya. It was only Thursday, but it was packed. We leaned in, ready to taste some Russian wine and learn all about it, way back to the beginning. Wine Bazaar's Spanish-inspired tapas were meant to accompany specific wines, but they came all at once. Much of the pairing structure was thus abandoned, though few complained. In fact, Serdyuk himself openly condones such rule-breaking, dismissing highfalutin wine attitudes in favor of drinking wine when and how you want it.

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And drink we did — a generous 10 wines from light to dark that displayed quite a chunk of the Alma Valley range. Their whites are fruity and floral, thanks to stainless steel rather than oak barrels. Reds are brooding and full of character. In keeping with Serdyuk's attitude, AV's Summer Rosé is just as good in winter. Each wine we tried was thoughtful and drinkable, but the Reserve versions (made from the crop's most promising expression of flavor) are outstanding. The group agreed — Chardonnay Reserve and Merlot Reserve topped the list. Our favorites from the WB kitchen were the tuna sashimi and the beef escalope with Gorgonzola sauce (though we found the bread lackluster).

Wine Bazaar is a gently lit, foliage-adorned backdrop for the things it values most: good company, life's simple pleasures and wine without fussiness. The friendly, enthusiastic atmosphere was so enjoyable that the following weekend found us at Sosed, another branch with a different menu and a personality all its own. Sosed also features intricate design touches, from handmade ornaments hanging overhead to candle arrangements brightening up corners. The especially snowy walk from Park Kultury metro was worth it once we were sipping pleasantly tart mulled wine and chatting over poached egg and salmon appetizers, surrounded by steaming piles of decadent blini and homemade spreads. Kachalova's philosophy is felt in her establishments, which exude warmth and comfort. They're the place to be with friends, and to have your wine with (or without) whatever you want. No rules, no judgment.

If you want to read more about Wine Bazaar, Alma Valley, and the people behind them, see our full interviews with Evgenia Kachalova and Igor Serdyuk [here](#) and [here](#).

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