

# DINING OUT

## Disco turned wine cellar a cozy space for light dining

### Simple flavors shine through on tapas menu

Susan S. Yeske

When the Lambertville Station opened for business in 1982, disco was king.

The bottom floor of the restaurant was designed as a disco lounge, complete with mirrored walls, dance floor and a disco ball that cast a thousand shafts of light on the young people who flocked to the restaurant to take advantage of the New Jersey law that allowed them to drink at age 18.

Eventually disco went out of style, the drinking age went back to 21 and the lounge area was converted to a piano bar. Over the years a variety of singers and musicians have taken their turns entertaining from the small stage at the edge of the dance floor.

Fast forward to 2010, a different time with different tastes. Last month the Station's owners quietly reopened the bottom floor of the restaurant after months of renovations.

Under the creative eye of local restaurateur and interior designer Jim Hamilton, the mirrored walls were removed and a new look has emerged. Roman arches, exposed stonework and beams, a fireplace, brick floor, a bar carved from a single block of walnut and a tin ceiling all are part of the new Lambertville Station Wine Cellar and tapas bar.

"We really thought it was time to do something fresh," said Rose DiMarco, who owns the Station with partners Daniel Whitaker and Michael Dougherty. "The physical space had really looked the same since 1982."

The partners thought about using the space for a cocktail bar, but eventually settled on the wine bar



*A cheese selection is one of the offerings for small meals.*

**Photographs by Kat Mojzesz**

*The wine cellar at the Lambertville Station is a cozy place for a light meal or as a precursor to a large meal.*

concept with a tapas (small plates) menu.

While the main floor of the restaurant continues to serve traditional meals, the wine cellar allows people to have appetizers or to graze, DiMarco said.

"The menu is a lot of fun, something different from upstairs," she said, adding that the response from customers has been positive. "People are coming here to the lounge and not leaving."

Executive chef Christopher Beall devoted three months to research before designing the menu.

"I wanted a menu where simple flavors would shine through and be paired with wines without undermining the food," he said.

His studies included learning a great deal about cheese, which dominates the wine cellar menu. An international sampling of a dozen hard, soft and semi-soft cheeses includes blues and chevras made from cow's, sheep's and goat's milks. For variety and seasonality, he includes select "chef's choice" cheeses.

One recent night when a mango blue was featured, a couple ordered the cheese and a bottle of Dom Perignon, Beall said, before having dinner. On another night, a bright apricot blue cheese received rave from diners.

Those looking for something other than cheese won't be disappointed. The tapas portion of the menu includes crab cakes, rabbit

sausage, lollipop lamb chops and two kinds of scallops. His flatbreads include a Margherita pizza made with fresh mozzarella. Hand-crafted chocolates offer original desserts for the wine cellar.

Developing the new menu was "a great adventure," he said.

Station general manager and sommelier Jim Hall is in charge of the lounge's wine selection, which ranges in price from \$20 bottles of Sweet Jam Shiraz 2009 and Per Linda Montepulciano 2007 to \$270 bottles of Amuse Bouche Red Blend. He has selected more than 50 boutique wines available by the bottle or glass, including 15 new varietals specially selected for the debut of the Wine Cellar.

A variety of wine flights are offered in the cellar, served from handsome tiered holders. They have fanciful names including Backpacking in Italy, made up of Italian wines; Land of Oz and Beyond, which features Australian wines; Mozart in Three Movements, a trio of Austrian vintages; Napa Valley Cabernets and Unique White Wines.

Elegant, comfortable and cozy, decorated in a combination of old and new, the wine cellar is a place where couples or friends can gather for interesting food, wine and conversation, whether as a precursor to a large meal or as a lighter alternative.

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## LAMBERTVILLE STATION WINE CELLAR

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**Hours:** Monday-Friday 5-11 p.m., Saturday-Sunday noon-closing.

**Cost:** Wine: by the glass \$5.25-\$15, by the bottle \$20-\$270 (half-bottles available in many vintages); wine flights \$8-\$11.75. Food: charcuterie \$6-\$8, cheeses \$6-\$8, tapas \$9-\$15, flatbreads \$6-\$7.

**Featured small plates:** imported cheeses, rabbit sausage, lollipop lamb chops, citrus scallops, Margherita pizza.