

executive lifestyles

Wine & Spirits

By Stacie Kress Booker



A ROSÉ CONCEPT

Walk into one of the three new Cork & Olive stores in the Tampa Bay area, and you'll be greeted by someone who looks more like a server in a chic restaurant than a store clerk. Dressed in black slacks and burgundy button-down shirts, these "wine guides" aim to introduce customers to a new way of thinking about and choosing wine.

"You won't find a Kendall-Jackson or a Mondavi here," says St. Petersburg store manager J.C. Milam. What you will find is an assortment of unique wines from smaller, family-owned vineyards from around the world. They're displayed upright on open shelving, with labels easily visible. The moderate-priced wines are eye-level, with lower-priced vintages on shelves below and pricier wines displayed higher up. The average bottle runs about \$10.50.

The store, Milam says, aims to take the snobbery and lofty prices out of wine drinking. Customers are encouraged to find out what they like by tasting, rather than through a rating sys-



tem: At least 12 bottles of wine are open daily; customers are welcome to sit in one of the shop's leather chairs and sample as many as they'd like.

Cork & Olive is the brainchild of German-born Michael Probst, who wants the company

to become for wine drinkers what Starbucks is to coffee drinkers. The company, headquartered in Tampa, opened its first stores in Clearwater, Valrico and St. Petersburg last year. Three more are set to open by next month, all in the Tampa Bay area.

HOLD THE PRETENSE: Manager J.C. Milam says Cork & Olive aims to take the snobbery out of wine drinking.



COGNAC, REBORN

Cognac, that venerable, heady, after-dinner drink from France, is experiencing a resurgence as a whole new age group sips from snifters. It's not their grandfather's brandy, but rather a lighter, less powerful version to be enjoyed before dinner, as a cocktail or on the nightclub scene.

Laurent Fortin, vice president of U.S. sales for Camus Cognac, a family-owned producer that began distribution in Florida last year, says the hip-hop crowd as well as yuppies, especially women, are the latest imbibers. Seraphin, a premium XO, has caught on with more urban drinkers, while Josephine, a light, non-woody cognac and also an XO, has become popular among women.

Florida, Fortin points out, is a big cognac-drinking state.



Camus Cognac: A hit with hip-hoppers and yuppies alike.