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September 11, 2003

GOING OUT

Wine bar nouveau

■ Bodega offers a stylish alternative to the sports bars and Irish pubs of Old Town Pasadena.

By Max Padilla, Special to The Times

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At Bodega, a wine bar inside Pasadena's Paseo Colorado, patrons, the majority of them female, are perched at outdoor tables and on Philippe Starck sofas to gab, flirt and sip on a warm Thursday.

Cocking her tweed cap, Kandal Smith, 24, of Arcadia explains why she's a regular. "It's a hipper atmosphere compared to anywhere else in the Pasadena area," she says, holding a glass of Australian Woop Woop Shiraz. "It's more mellow, and they serve really good wine."



Partners in wine
 (Ricardo DeAratanha / LAT)

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Though a popular destination for dining, Old Town Pasadena didn't have much on tap in terms of nightlife, save for a few sports bars, Irish pubs, breweries and a Hooters. Locals would flee to Hollywood, the Westside or the divey Colorado Bar on the eastern edge of the city.

"We always joked that we were never going back to Pasadena," says Bodega owner Greg Sears, who like partner Jason McEntee hails from neighboring San Marino and Arcadia.

Bodega Wine Bar

Where: 260 E. Colorado Blvd. #208, Pasadena

When: Monday-Sunday, 3 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Specials: Happy Mondays with DJ Lux: \$4 calimochos; Tuesday: \$15 Flight Night; Andrew Jackson Wednesdays: bottles \$20

Info: (626) 793-4300 or Bodegawinebar.com



The 30-year-old former ad execs met each other through college friends before they were reacquainted in the cubicles at TBWA/Chiat/Day in Marina del Rey. Sears had lived in San Francisco and McEntee in San Diego, where wine bars were cozy neighborhood affairs. Finding a lack of such places in L.A., they quit their day jobs to open Bodega (Spanish for a wine cellar or bar) a stone's throw from Old Town.

Make, a local design firm, gave Bodega a sleek modern look that is more Barcelona's Passeig de Gracia than Paseo Colorado, with an indoor-outdoor cafe and a backlit wine rack behind the bar.

Sears and McEntee hired a friend, a former sous chef at Spago and Patina, to concoct a menu of appetizers, salads, panini and pizzas. "Simple, so one of us could do it," adds Sears.

And they have an equally simple way of selecting wines. "We taste it and if we like it we put it on the menu," says McEntee.

Bodega's brief wine list features bottles from France, Italy, Spain, Australia, Chile and California. The vintages are priced the same — \$7 a glass, \$20 a carafe and \$30 a bottle — to encourage drinkers to experiment and not let cost be a factor.

Since Bodega opened eight months ago, the establishment has drawn more of a young crowd that's eager to learn about the vine in an atmosphere with little pretentiousness. Servers will offer suggestions. The wine list includes flavor notes.

The bar does have a cozy neighborhood feel. And because the Paseo has living spaces as well as shops, many residents make Bodega their last call.

Kyle Yeoh, 31, and Alessandra Andolina, 27, are both East Coast transplants who live in the village. "It makes me feel like home," says Yeoh, an engineer from New York City.

Thrown into the mix of singles tonight are some tourists and a table of professional golfers in town for a state tournament. "We're five years older than most people here but we don't feel out of place," says David Willis, 40, of Sydney. Adds Lee, his wife, "It's more of what we're suited to in Australia; they have a lot more wine bars."

There are a number of Hollywood residents who've made the trek. Over DJ Big Dave's set, Nora Gordon, 27, of Hollywood and Audra Triska, 26, from the Valley, savor glasses of Routas Rouviere rose. Wearing all black, Gordon, an architect, came to check out the bar's layout and wines. Triska, a singer who resembles Jill Scott, is a little disapproving of the crowd: "It's very Pasadena, very suburban."

And there are those who seek to benefit from the favorable male-female ratio rather than compare Rieslings.

"I would be drinking a Ketel One and cranberry to be honest, but they don't have that here," says Derek Vineyard. The 29-year-old from Hollywood, in a trucker hat and white T-shirt, is nursing an Amstel Light — though his last name might suggest otherwise.

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