In Italian, enoteca denotes a special shop where patrons sample wines from nearby vineyards by sniffing and sipping as they nibble on small meals or snacks designed to complement specific vintages. Such is the idea behind Bin 26 Enoteca on Beacon Hill. The brother-sister team of Azita Bina-Seibel and Babak Bina (who own Lala Rokh, a very good Persian restaurant nearby) has crafted a convivial spot where boldly flavored Italian-inspired food is served with 223 wines, including more than 70 available by the glass. That's many more than most restaurants, thanks to a machine that preserves shelf life by filling a partly empty bottle with nitrogen to preclude entrance of the dreaded spoiler, oxygen.

Somewhat confusingly, glasses come in four sizes, from 750 milliliters (an entire bottle) down to 100 (about a third of a standard wineglass). The owners provide a wonderful variety, including organic wines and offerings from smaller vintners, and the system allows diners at any level of oenophilia to mix and match (and learn about) exquisite wines. As wine appreciation in the United States grows, Bina explains, “palates are understanding that there are so many wines to enjoy without prejudice.” (Be warned, though: numerous tastings can prove expensive.)

We began with a semi-fizzy Basque country wine, Txakoli Arabako Txakolina “Xarmant” Amurrio 2007, which played well to the crispy grilled sardines ($16) wrapped in grape leaves and served with a rich melange of orange and yellow peppers and onions (along with a particularly tasty Tuscan olive oil). Another starter, the chef’s strangely cold and flavorless homemade pâté ($8), proved the only downside of the evening.

The fusilli with wild boar bacon, pancetta, and onion in a tomato sauce ($15) looked like a pile of worms in red clay, but was absolutely delectable—especially washed down with the Gamay Domaine du Vissoux “Cuvee Traditionelle” Beaujolais, 2006. Also rewarding was the thickly cut duck breast with snippets of rhubarb and cubed turnip ($27). The veggies were a bit undercooked, just as we like them, and the turnip’s earthy, bitter heart and the rhubarb’s springy sourness balanced the rich meat. So good was the “horsy, barnyard” essence (so said our waiter) of the accompanying Brucher Pinot Noir, Aubaine Vineyards, California, 2004, that we later went on line to order our own case. Downright airy (next to the duck) was Mediterranean sea bass ($29) grilled with lemon, thyme, and asparagus: an honest dish lured to the wild side by a seductive red-pepper coulis.

For dessert, don’t fail to try the chocolate berry “stack” ($9): two squares of dense, mousse-like cake with a scoop of tangy raspberry gelato. (Let’s just say we licked the plate clean.) The lime cream tart ($9) boasted a fine custard with shortbread, accented with pine nuts and rhubarb steeped with sugar and strawberries.

The loving care taken with both food and wine is evident throughout this unexpectedly refined local bistro. The place seats about 65 people in two small rooms and a nicely incorporated front bar; it’s cozy, not overcrowded. But sparseness rules; any decorative touches are wine-related: coatracks of cork, a wall decoupage with hundreds of wine labels, and wine racks affording privacy. At Bin 26, even the bathrooms are worth a visit. Just look up. ~S.F.B.

**BIN 26 ENOTeca**
26 Charles Street
Boston
Reservations recommended.

---

Reprinted from *Harvard Magazine*. For more information, contact Harvard Magazine, Inc. at 617-495-5746.