

CHRIS SA HARLEY VENTRELLE: TIPS INCLUDED

Continental dining returns -- one continent at a time

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FOLLOWING THE WAVE of new steakhouses and barbecue joints has been a surge in international restaurant openings. So if that passport backlog stranded you stateside this summer -- relax -- a driver's license is all you need to indulge a world of flavor cravings...

SPAIN BY THE OUNCE: Walnut Creek welcomed a high-tech wine bar last month with the opening of **Artisan Wine Lounge & Cafe**. Located on Bonanza Street near McCovey's, this is an intimate, relaxed spot serving wine, tapas and dessert.

Be warned that the shiny, self-serve Enomatic Tasting Machine is a pricey addiction. Tasters select from wines dispensed by the ounce. An ounce of one of the 32 wines available ranges from \$1.40 to \$11.40 for the 2003 Cain Five. Artisan promotes small-production California wines with a couple of Spanish wines thrown in.

"People like this concept because there isn't anything else like it in Walnut Creek," says owner Lena Chu, who also owns Stave Wine Lounge in Napa.

Chu, who grew up in Spain, plans to expand the food menu to larger plates very shortly. For now, look for a tapas menu with several traditional Spanish bites. Offerings include Montadito de Sobrasada y Miel (Spanish sausage and honey) or Jamon Serrano Reserva. A dozen dessert choices include raspberry cheesecake, assorted gelati and an exotic bomba. Artisan Wine Lounge & Cafe, 1633 Bonanza St., Walnut Creek, 925-280-1633.