

by Melinda Joe
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3 Tokyo wine bars with a regional focus

Whether its a specific varietal you crave or a chance to educate your palate, these Tokyo wine bars can help: Old Vine Cellar Door, Aizbar and Elevage



The moody Old Vine Cellar Door is most proud of its space-age *Enomatic wine server* but has a full bar for those in need of something non-grape based.

Perhaps you fancy a Merlot tonight, or maybe a Shiraz. Possibly you have no idea what the difference is and would just like someone to explain. Whichever of these situations best describes your wine wishes, here are three Tokyo wine bars that can help you out, run by serious oenophiles whose enthusiasm for the wines of a particular region is infectious. Your glass is likely to come with a with a free geography lesson and a generous helping of wine trivia.

Wines from Australia, such as 2005 Charles Melton Nine Popes, head the line-up at Old Vine Cellar Door (Nishi Azabu 1106 Bldg, Nishi Azabu 1-10-6, Minato-ku, tel. 03 5771 2439, www.oldvine.jp), *where wines by the glass are dispensed in precise 120, 60 or 15ml pours from a sleek steel and glass contraption at the back of the bar called the Enomatic. Designed to serve each wine at its optimal temperature, the machines are all the rage in Australia, says proprietor Jiro Kinoshita.* Kinoshita is on a first-name basis with some of the country's top producers and has a number of rare vintages in his 2,000-bottle collection.

If a glass of California Chardonnay is your preferred tippie, head for Aizbar (Kami Osaki 2-26-5, Shinagawa-ku, 03 5434 0117). Sommelier Ai Eto lets her mood dictate what to serve at this hidden bar in Meguro. The wine menu changes daily but the focus is on the United States. The place only seats eight people, so it's best to call ahead.

Elevage (Hachiman Bldg 2F, Nishi Azabu 4-2-13, Minato-ku, tel. 03 6419 3889) specializes in wines from France,

with particular emphasis on those from the Burgundy and Bordeaux regions. Guests are free to peruse the wine books and magazines that line the shelves near the entrance, but owner Takefumi Yoshida can probably answer any question you might have. Customers can sign up for Yoshida's newsletter, where he announces the special wines he'll be opening each week. Regulars read it religiously, in order not to miss the chance to try a 1999 Richebourg Grand Cru or 1947 Chateau Petrus in prime condition.