

Food & Wine

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The brains behind The Local Vine; a fourth for Julia's

By Nancy Leson; Seattle Times restaurant critic

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PHOTO COURTESY THE LOCAL VINE

The new Local Vine wine bar in Belltown is intended as a kind of "coffee shop" for wine lovers.

Nancy Leson on KPLU

The Seattle Times restaurant critic's commentaries on food and restaurants can be heard on KPLU-FM (88.5) at 5:30 a.m., 7:30 a.m. and 4:44 p.m. Wednesdays, and at 8:30 a.m. Saturdays.

You don't need a Harvard MBA to open a wine bar in Seattle, but **Sarah Munson** and **Allison Nelson** are out to prove it can't hurt.

Neither can teaming up with consulting chef **Jason Wilson** of **Crush**, whose seasonal small-plates menu is an added attraction that should make **The Local Vine** — which opened last week in Belltown — that much more appealing to the locals. The new wine bar (at 2520 Second Ave., No. 113, Seattle; 206-441-6000; www.thelocalvine.com) offers nearly 100 wines by the glass, kept lively with a high-tech Enomatic wine-preservation system.

Open daily from 1 p.m. to 2 a.m., the place is envisioned as a kind of "coffee shop" for wine weenies, who can sip cult cabs like Screaming Eagle at (gulp!) \$350 a glass. It's also primed to be a learning place for those who don't know their chardonnay from their viognier, with most pours in the \$5-\$10 range. Wi-Fi is free.

On tap: weekly wine tastings with guest winemakers and other experts. And in a stroke of marketing genius, The Local Vine offers wine cards that keep track of what you've drunk,



whether or not you liked it, and (holy Netflix!) can offer recommendations based on your personal tastes.

Munson and Nelson, the brains behind the brand, are Harvard Business School grads who've individually helped launch, manage, market and strategize — and make the folks at Hah-vahd proud — while doing business with companies whose names dot the globe. Coincidentally, a couple of years back, work opportunities landed them both in Seattle, and while chatting about work and life over dinner at **SeaStar** in Bellevue, they hatched a plan to strike out on their own.

"Six months later, I quit my job," says Munson, who "put together a very pretty business plan" for their Belltown wine bar — the first of what they hope will be a succession of Local Vines. "We've identified several locations that we'd like to expand to fairly quickly," Munson says, citing opportunities on the Eastside, in Tacoma, Spokane and elsewhere east of the mountains.

Seeking out a chef to help with their project, the pair approached Wilson of Crush (2319 E. Madison St., Seattle; 206-30-CRUSH, www.crushonmadison.com), who says he and his wife, Nicole, had been "out hunting" for a second, bar-

centric venue, à la **Lark** and **Licorous**. Instead, he signed with the Vine.

As culinary director, he's developed the menu, trained staff at his catering kitchen in South Lake Union, and sees this venture as a culinary partnership that "allows me a creative outlet, allows my team a creative outlet and gives me street cred as someone who can produce more approachable, affordable food."