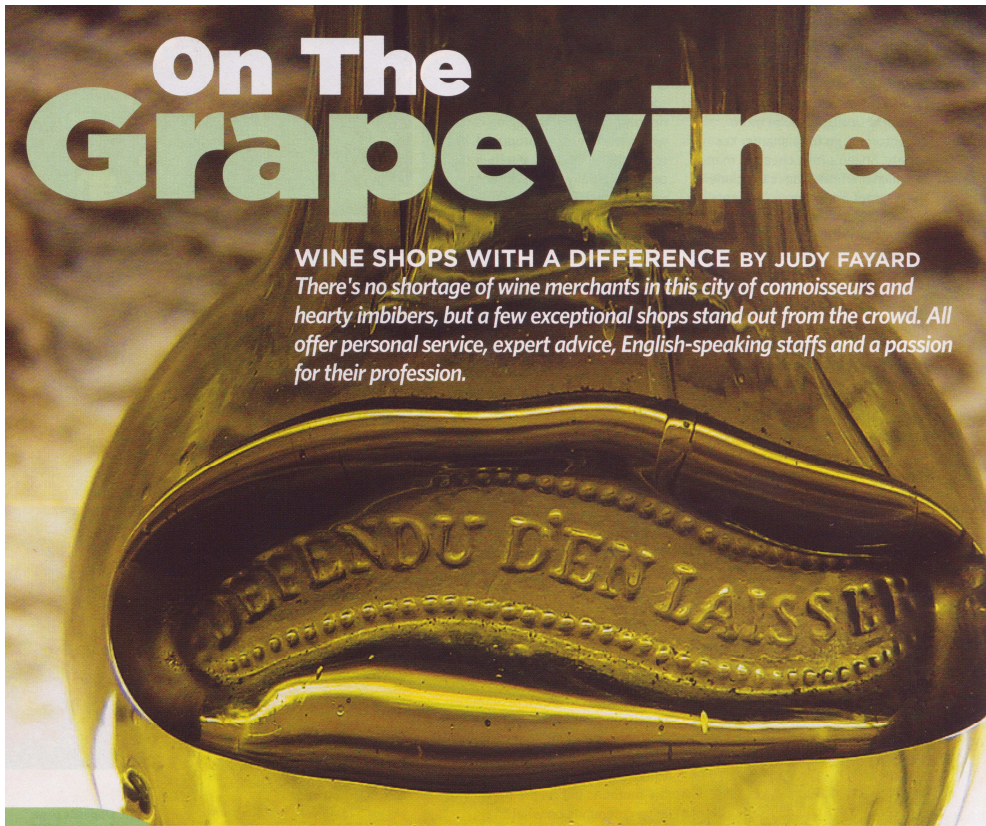


On The Grapevine

WINE SHOPS WITH A DIFFERENCE BY JUDY FAYARD
There's no shortage of wine merchants in this city of connoisseurs and hearty imbibers, but a few exceptional shops stand out from the crowd. All offer personal service, expert advice, English-speaking staffs and a passion for their profession.



De Vinis Illustribus, as the name implies, specializes in old, rare and illustrious wines from great vineyards and exceptional vintages. Owner Lionel Michelin started out working in telecommunications, until his passion for wines took over. He joined a tasting club, started visiting vineyards and buying wines. Eventually he found himself with some 2,500 bottles, and in 1992 he went into business, at first with his own stock, later by buying the contents of cellars for sale. He had no shop, just an office with a large cave, but, he says, "it worked right away."

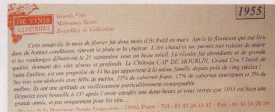
Then last year he found a Left Bank location that might have been chosen by Bacchus himself: the former shop and cellars of Jean-Baptiste Besse. Monsieur Besse, who died in 1997, was a Paris institution for well over a half-century, presiding over a chaotic labyrinth of wooden cases and bottles stacked pell-mell from floor to ceiling. The lower levels were even more disorderly, covered in cobwebs and thick layers of dust. When Michelin took over, he found more than 25,000 bottles, some

literally buried in the dirt floor by the weight of cases and bottles on top. Today there's no trace of the legendary shambles, just an elegant salesroom with exposed stone walls and wooden beams. The now-pristine 17th-century cellars offer such rarities as Château Yquem 1893 and 1901, Château La Conseillante 1923, or Château Latour 1967, along with Champagnes, Cognacs and Armagnacs. De Vinis prides itself on personal service, and Michelin happily spends as much time conferring with a customer whose single-bottle budget tops out at €35-€40 as with a collector for whom €400 or €500 is not unusual.

Gift bottles commemorating a birthday or anniversary year are a specialty, packaged with a full commentary on the weather, the harvest and the chosen wine. (For a 1955 Saint-Emilion: "February was mild and March exceptionally cold..."). And since De Vinis is also a neighborhood wine shop, there's also a small selection of "very pleasant" everyday wines priced between €8-€15.

Founded in 1880, **Legrand Filles et Fils** has grown from a small coffee-tea-and-spices outlet of France's Compagnie des Indes to a Parisian landmark offering some 300 different French and foreign wines, gourmet food products, tableware and wine accessories, Riedel glassware, Laguiole and Nontron knives, a bookshop, a wine bar with lunchtime salads and cold plates, a wine school and musical wine-tasting soirées. It's also, as promised on the superb 19th-century facade, a *confiserie*, selling old-fashioned bonbons dispensed from big glass jars.

Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, the venerable shop was taken over in 1918 by Pierre Legrand, who bought wine by the barrel and bottled it himself. Passed down to his son Lucien then to Lucien's daughter Francine, in 2000 it was sold to a pair of connoisseurs wine lovers, Christian de Chateaueux and Gérard Sibourd-Baudry. Extending from the rue de la Banque through to the historic glass-roofed Galerie Vivienne, Legrand now offers wines from €5 to €15 in the original street-side



Opposite: a historic 1848 bottle at De Vinis Illustribus, warning that it's "forbidden to leave any". Above, wines at De Vinis Illustribus, including (top) a gift-packaged 1955 Saint-Emilion. Below: the dinosaur fossil at L'Insolite. Bottom: a small part of the immense selection at Lavinia.



L'INSOLITE/NORMAN GODWIN

shop. Next come whiskies, liqueurs, *eaux-de-vie*, Cognacs, Armagnacs and Calvados, while top-level vintages are displayed in the new wine bar, with tables "outside" in the glass-roofed passage. Opposite, the tableware boutique and bookshop is, true to family tradition, run by Francine Legrand's daughter, Anne Richard.

Billed as the biggest wine store in France, the three-story **Lavinia** covers 1500 sq. meters (16,000 sq ft), with 6000 different wines and spirits from 43 countries - all horizontally displayed in dramatically curving walls designed by Spanish architect Antonio de la Pena, with lighting, humidity and temperature all carefully controlled. Opened in 2002 by French entrepreneurs Thierry Servant and Pascal Chevrot, after their initial success with similar stores in Madrid and Barcelona, Lavinia also offers wine-tastings with visiting winemakers, wine classes, an accessories boutique and bookstore and a helpful staff of 15 sommeliers. Upstairs, the wine-tasting bar and a lunch-only restaurant serve wines by the glass or bottles at their retail prices.

The six-foot dinosaur-bone fossil in the entryway lets you know you're in for something different at **La Cave de l'Insolite**. The word means unusual or odd, and it's at work here in its most delightful sense. Opened in 2002 by Michel Moulerat, a wine lover who's been in the business since the 1980s, the small neighborhood shop specializes in wines from small, mostly French vineyards, and prices start at €8. While "organic" is a much-misused word, says Moulerat's associate Romain Pennel, the wines here are all "clean" and natural, with little or no sulphur or other additives. Many of the vineyards practice biodynamic farming, and some harvest by hand. All are wines that strongly express their local *terroir*, and sometimes more: the label on Domaine Montrieux Coteaux du Vendômois adds a verse by Molière.

But L'Insolite is also an antique shop, offering - beyond the dinosaur fossil - a jumble of Japanese pottery and furniture, a coal stove, a row of old theater seats and other bric-a-brac. And it's an art gallery, displaying the exceptional works of Romain's father Eric Pennel, a lapidary artist who works in semi-precious stones including agate, lapis lazuli and rock crystal. Easily mistaken for paintings at first glance, they are marvelous, and definitely *insolite*.

And also:
Caues Augé Founded in 1850, a beautiful wood-paneled emporium that's a favorite of such well-known chefs as Yves Camdeborde and Alain Ducasse.
La Dernière Goutte Congenial American owner Juan Sanchez specializes in small producers from the Languedoc and Provence.
Caues Taillevent An annex of the three-star restaurant Taillevent, with an extraordinary collection of more than 50,000 bottles.

wine bars

A small selection of favorite Parisian wine bars. All will be festively overcrowded on Beaujolais Nouveau Day, Thursday November 17.

Mélac - With his trademark handlebar mustache, Jacques Mélac runs one of the most popular wine bars in town, with its own "vineyard" growing along the facade. Wines from the Languedoc and the Loire Valley are served with cheeses, *charcuterie* and other specialties from the Auvergne and Aveyron regions of central France. 42 rue Léon-Frot (11th), 01.40.09.93.37.

Le Rubis - Still going strong, this Parisian institution is jam-packed almost all the time, but on Beaujolais Nouveau night the crowd spills into the streets until all hours. Hearty regional dishes are served, if you can find a table. 10 rue du Marché-Saint-Honoré (1st), 01.42.61.03.34.

La Taverne Henri IV - A simple and very appealing little wine bar on the tip of the Ile de la Cité, offering wines from all over France with a special emphasis on Beaujolais (try the crisp cold white). 13 pl du Pont-Neuf (1st), 01.43.54.27.90.

Au Sauvignon - For nearly 50 years an institution in St-Germain-des-Prés, serving *charcuterie* and cheeses to accompany a small selection of Loire and Beaujolais wines. 80 rue des Saints-Pères (6th), 01.45.48.49.02.

L'Ecluse - A small chain specializing in top wines by the glass. 15 quai des Grands Augustins (6th), 01.46.33.58.74; 13 rue de la Roquette (11th), 01.48.05.19.12; 15 pl de la Madeleine (8th), 01.42.65.34.69.

Les Dessous de la Robe - Tucked into a 17th-century building, with exposed beams and a charming mezzanine balcony, a wine bar and a restaurant serving classic regional food. 4 rue Bertin-Poirée (1st), 01.40.26.68.18.

wine tasting classes

Young wine expert Olivier Magny offers delightful, down-to-earth wine-tasting classes in English at his own Parisian loft, explaining the winemaking process, tasting techniques and how to pair wine with food. Basic 5 or 7 wine tastings €40-€50, special courses on Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne (€75). Wine & Cheese (€80) or Champagne (€95). O Château, 100 rue de la Folle-Méricourt (11th), 01.44.73.97.80.