

## Merchants news

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*"We want to spend time with our customers and want them to hang out in our shops so we've got nice spaces for people to sit"*

# At your added service, sir



More independent wine merchants are diversifying into cafes and bars as a way of both growing revenue and generating interest in their wines. But which business models are proving the most successful? **Ed Robertson** reports

The first rule of business is to focus on doing what you know best. But if you knew your customers actually wanted more from you, and those ancillary services could help drive your core trade, wouldn't you be tempted to try it?

One wine merchant experimenting with his offering is David McWilliams, owner of BinTwo in Padstow, Cornwall, who has overseen a gradual expansion of his independent wine shop since it first opened in 2003. "We're a shop and a Champagne and coffee bar," he says. "The important point to stress is that we have more arrows in our quiver than straight wine or coffee sales."

McWilliams says the hardest part was winning a licence for wine consumption in 2005: "Even my solicitor was against it. He didn't think we'd win. Adding seating wasn't a huge expense – fortunately the premises lends itself to it – and we've developed gradually. We push the small area we have."

In 2009 the decision was made to start selling coffee and the shop can now seat eight customers inside with space for a further 16 in a small seating area in front of the shop.

During the winter customers are served by two full-time staff, while six staff rotate during the summer when the Cornish fishing village and major

foodie destination is packed with tourists.

McWilliams says the shop always has Champagne available by the glass. The Billecart-Salmon Brut Réserve is the house pour and other bottles are opened during the peak and festival seasons.

BinTwo is currently offering four white wines: Knightor Madeleine Angevine, Jackson Estate Sauvignon Blanc, Picpoul de Pinet and a Pouilly Fuissé, while the two reds on offer are a Rioja and a Valpolicella.

McWilliams charges between £4 and £7.50 per 175ml glass. "It is great. People are effectively paying for the tasting and

they're having a jolly good time," he says.

"I'm aware that we waste some wine, but not as much as people might fear. The odd bottle doesn't quite make it through to the end of the following day."

With between 300 and 350 wines on sale in the shop costing between £6 and £106, around half of which retails between £12 and £25, customers can also open and consume their own purchases for an £8.50 corkage fee.

While customers are asking him to start serving food, McWilliams is sticking to bread and olives. "We're quite small here. We're not a restaurant and we don't pretend to be one."



Cafes offer merchants an excellent opportunity to promote wine sales



### Stay focused

Hal Wilson, managing director of Cambridge Wine Merchants, agrees that, while it is worth looking at how to offer more from a wine shop, it should not become a distraction.

Since 2011, the company has been offering customers the chance to either try a glass of wine or open a bottle in three of its seven shops.

While there is a menu available offering nibbles from a bowl of olives or almonds for £1 to £10 for a platter of cured meats, cheeses, bread and olives, he will not add anything else.

"We're not a restaurant or a cafe," Wilson says. "We want to spend time