

Cork Wine & Tapas offers something unique and a focus on food, wine and details



The gorgeous front of Cork's Joseph Taber building at 90 Front Street, built in 1836.

Being a foodie – OK, foodie junkie – one of my favorite aspects of writing is sharing some of the best eateries in the south coast, Massachusetts area. Nay, the planet – because we DO have some of the best restaurants on earth. I'm not talking about the "personal waitstaff a half dozen strong, you are served 18 thimble sized courses, and take out a small bank loan to pay for it. Oh, yeah – what was the food even like?" kind of place. I'm talking about places where food is the central focus and everything else revolves around it in a complimentary fashion.

Those fancy-schmancy places may be fabulous, but I was raised in this blue-collar city and don't want that type of unnecessary flair. I'm a Yankee at heart. It's not about the fireworks, bells and whistles. Let's focus. It's about the

food in terms of something unique or original. The knowledge and personality of your waiter: efficient, attentive, knowledgeable...friendly, but not overbearing.



Chef John Bentley showing off the Local Littlenecks – Steamed with chorizo, hot peppers, and diced tomato in a lemon, garlic, and beer sauce.

Cork Wine and Tapas is an easy place for me to write about. It's a place I frequent often. It's a place I go to for the food, the atmosphere, the locals. To blow off steam and unwind. Besides, it's the only place around that you can get *tapas* or small plates of food served while drinking.

Tapas is of Spanish origin and is a sort of lifestyle in Spain. Everyone does it. The concept is this: you want to head out with the special someone or a group of good folks. Your objective? Great conversation and fun. You need fuel for this, but you don't want to eat heavy. You don't want to eat in the standard fashion of appetizer, entree and dessert. Small plates of food mean that you can pace yourself while enjoying wine and company. You don't want that stuffed feeling or any of the drowsiness that comes with being stuffed – if you are...ahem...wiser in age, like I am.

Small plates don't mean thimbles. Read appetizer sized, not entree sized. In Spain, they are very tiny portions – but as

always, America is a melting pot of cultures. We have no problem adopting someone else's idea, but we always make it our own. Cork serves more generous portions than you will find in Spain – their way. They take the basic concept of portions, but match the ingredients with the concept of *terroir* – the French culinary concept of using the local geography, geology and climate in your ingredients. Chef John Bentley has batted it – smashed it – out of the park, by perfectly marrying the Spanish import with America and the element of *terroir*.

Cork breaks their *tapas* down into two types: cold and hot. Some of the cold *tapas*: there is a variety of salads, tuna *tartare*, crostinis, marinated peppers, and even a yet to try panko-encrusted goat cheese.



Cork backs up their local, domestic and international wine with well-versed and knowledgeable waitstaff.

My two favorites that cure my daily ails: the Cheese Platter – the chef's selection of local and international cheeses; served with grilled crostini, infused honey, and fresh fruits and the Ceviche – Shrimp and scallop marinated with jalapeno, tomato, cucumber, and citrus juices; served with tortilla crisps.

I'll be honest. When Mike and I get the cheese platter, I'm counting. Did he just take three extra protons worth of cheese and slather his cracker with them? Does he think I'm not watching? Well, let's see how he likes it when I eat an extra crostini! Uh-oh – they gave us an odd number of figs and grapes? Did we not tip properly when we were last here? Maybe he didn't notice. Do I take the extra or will I get German Suplexed?

The warm *tapas* menu is a bit larger in terms of offerings, standard and original: pan seared New Bedford scallops, littlenecks, Philly cheesesteak spring rolls, empanadas, truffled fritas, nori rolls and one that Mike and I get every single time we go, without exception: grilled flatbread. The flatbread changes from day to day and the server will announce that days selection when you are seated. Whatever the choice is, is irrelevant. Cut her/him off and say "I don't care what the flatbread is today. Put it in my belly."

Of course, there are many more *tapas* offerings on the menu which changes with the seasons, than I can mention. There are, of course, soup and desserts. Sticking with the theme of originality and *terroir* there is clam & corn chowder, wild mushroom & roasted garlic bisque (insanely good) and the delectable chorizo & sweet potato soup. In terms of dessert there is a flourless chocolate cake, Crème Brulee, sorbet and house-made cheesecake.



One of my favorite dishes EVER: Cheese platter: Blue cheese, New England Camembert,

*cave -ged New York
Cheddar, New England
Chevre, fruit and then
some.*

Earlier I mentioned that the idea was to focus on the fare and no *taparia* worth its salt would be without wine, beer and spirits. Cork excels in this area. They have one of the most attractive bars I've ever been in. The stone and timber backdrop makes me feel like I am in the 19th century – one of my favorite time periods. What a great atmosphere and tone it sets. One of the many subtle touches that the people at Cork have worked hard on to perfect.

Cork is one of the premier destinations on the South Coast that has a staff that is clearly trained to be as knowledgeable as they are with the wine and pairing it. I wouldn't say that I am a wine oenophile, but wine is my choice of libation over beer and spirits. I've been drinking wine for two decades and am not a wine snob by any stretch of the imagination, but I *am* particular about what I like. I like bitter, heavy red wines. I like loads of tannins. I prefer complexity and intense mouthfeel. There is nothing more disappointing than poring over a wine list, unfamiliar with some of the offerings, and getting a stunned look on a waitperson face when you begin to inquire.

Even more frustrating is the waitperson that "wings it." Either poorly with a "Oh, that's *really* delicious!" or craftily with "It's a red wine with lots of tannins." – only to get a sweet wine with no tannins." Grrr. In the four years that I have been going to Cork, I have never had a waitperson stumped about the wine or give me a dishonest answer. I consistently get solid descriptions of the wine I am asking about. Every glass of wine I've ever gotten has matched their descriptions to a "t" and the only way that can happen is for the waitstaff to be tasting the wines on a regular basis. I'm

a big fan of the abundance philosophy when it comes to business and this clearly comes from the top from someone that practices this. Well done.



The people responsible for one of the area's best eateries.

Don't take my word for it, give your waiter or waitress a go!

Lastly, one of the aspects of Cork Wine and Tapas that brought me in the door initially was the live entertainment – original Spanish classical and neo-Flamenco music. The only place I know of anywhere, but Boston. You want to talk about ambiance! The music is a perfect setting for a romantic dinner. It compliments your experience, but being quiet enough to be there, but not force you to yell to converse with company. Yet, another thoughtful subtlety that is a theme at Cork. If you don't particularly care for this style of music, don't fret, there are plenty of other styles of music and local acts. Subscribe to their social media accounts to get updates on future entertainment.

Cork's Facebook is frequently updated with glorious images of tasty additions that will draw you in. You'll also find out about the entertainment, specials and any events. The YouTube channel gives you a visual sneak peek and the website lets you

make reservations online, supplies the seasonal menu, and information on the entertainment, directions, promotions and private parties.

Worried about parking downtown? Cork has a parking valet – simply pull up, hand the keys over and enjoy.

Cork has recently undergone rather large renovations, so if you haven't been in a while, you should revisit and see what they've done. If you have never been, you are missing out on something unique, original and special.



Don't stare too long. May induce drooling like a babe.

Cork Wine and Tapas

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Phone: 508-994-WINE (9463)

Open 7 days a week 11:30am-2am

Facebook: facebook.com/CorkNewBedford

Website: corkwineandtapas.com/

Videos: youtube.com/user/corkwineandtapas

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