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DRINKERS' GUIDE to STL



DISCOVER ST. LOUIS' RICH LIQUID CULTURE ➔

The city's liquid culture is alive and well, so there's no better time than the present to broaden your imbibing horizons. From beer and wine to spirits and cocktails, you won't find a shortage of opportunities to indulge—which is why we put together this compendium of must-try drinks, destinations and expert tips for uninitiated and seasoned tipplers alike.

Story by **MATT SORRELL** | Interior Photos by **WESLEY LAW** | Drink Photos by **KELLY WRIGHT**

Salt Seasonal Smash available at Salt.



Bar Les Frères

HAUTE HAUNTS »

BAR LES FRÈRES (7637 Wydown Blvd., 314.725.8880) This new kid on the block in Clayton has already made a splash with its classic cocktails and sophisticated, inviting Parisian atmosphere. Did we mention the glassware is French antique?

SUBZERO VODKA BAR (308 N. Euclid Ave., 314.367.1200) With more than 500 vodkas on hand (seriously, where else could you find Argentina's Primo?), this is the place in town to explore the subtleties of the spirit. The sleek décor and fine sushi don't hurt either.

THE SCOTTISH ARMS (8 South Sarah St., 314.535.0551) The Arms has 120 or so whiskies on hand at any one time, so it's definitely the place to hit to try that single-malt you just read about without having to buy the bottle. It also boasts a warm and inviting ambiance that's reminiscent of the best UK public houses.

TASTE (4584 Laclede Ave., 314.361.1200) Taste is one of the first true craft cocktail bars to open in St. Louis and it's still one of the best. Think speakeasy meets neighborhood watering hole. Make sure to ask for In A Pickle, featuring gin, St. Germain, dill and cucumber.

SALT (4356 Lindell Blvd., 314.932.5787) A selection of more than 20 bourbons, a dozen or so ryes and a solid offering of American malt whiskies, as well as a full range of classic and original cocktails, are all housed in a stately CWE manse.

DEMUN OYSTER BAR (740 DeMun Ave., 314.725.0322) Enjoy a charming selection of craft cocktails and the freshest seafood available to accompany them. The bar staff is especially adept at libations that feature sparkling wines to pair up with the oyster selection the restaurant is famous for.

SANCTUARIA WILD TAPAS (4198 Manchester Ave, 314.535.9700) With 200-plus drinks on various menus, this Grove hotspot provides one-stop shopping for all of your cocktail needs. As bar manager Matt Seiter likes to say, it's "the dive bar of cocktail bars."

BLOOD & SAND (1500 St. Charles Street, 314.241.7263) Named after the classic Scotch-based cocktail, you can be sure this members-only establishment knows a thing or two about mixing up some fine drinks. It also has one of the best bar menus in town, courtesy of Chef Chris Bork.

LESSONS IN LIQUOR

Spirits require a bit more caution when tasting than beer or wine. While nosing is still important, **Ally Nesbit**, owner of The Scottish Arms, says to remember that the beverage you're sticking your beak into has a much higher alcohol content than wine or beer, so be careful not to deaden your senses by taking too big a whiff.

Ted Kilgore, renowned mixologist and co-owner of soon-to-open Planter's House, maintains that the key to tasting spirits is not to be intimidated or over-think the process. He suggests concentrating on picking out the big flavor notes first and letting the more subtle tastes gradually unfold, adding that it takes time to build a "taste memory"—so don't get discouraged if the subtleties don't jump right out.

Steve Neukomm, owner of Square One Brewery & Distillery, says blind tasting is the best way to develop your palate for spirits. That way, you're only being influenced by the taste and not the label or your pre-conceived notion of the spirit.



FIND YOUR GO-TO COCKTAIL

Your quest for the perfect tipple should start with beverages and flavor profiles you already like.

Ted Kilgore of Taste suggests the (1) **MARTINEZ**, a classic combo of gin and sweet vermouth, for those who like the depth and flavor of red wines. For fans of wheat beers, he points to the (6) **AVIATION**, another gin-based drink that stays on the light side of the flavor spectrum, thanks to maraschino liqueur and lemon juice.

Nate Selsor, bar manager at DeMun Oyster Bar, likes to steer Belgian witbier fans to one of his custom creations called (2) **A WISE MAN ONCE SAID...**,

which features tequila, apricot liqueur and muddled sage. Already fond of white spirits? Sanctuaria's Matt Seiter recommends a classic (4) **MARTINI**, which, when properly made, showcases the charms of gin without overwhelming them. If you just know you want something sweet, a (7) **BEE'S KNEES**—gin, honey and lemon juice—should be just the thing.

According to Matt Obermark, co-owner and bar manager at Salt, the classic (5) **WIDOW'S KISS**,

built on a base of calvados, is a good entry point for cocktail rookies who like malty beers, while the (3) **PEGU CLUB** is a bright, herbaceous place to start for wine drinkers who gravitate toward sauvignon blancs or chenin blancs.

A customer who was fond of IPAs, whiskey and marble rye bread led Blood & Sand's Adam Frager to come up with a custom creation he dubbed (8) **SECOND TIME AROUND**, featuring Jameson Irish whiskey, Campari, aquavit and sweet vermouth.



Robust Wine Bar Downtown

VINO VENUES »

ROBUST WINE BAR (multiple locations, robustwinebar.com) Both the original Webster Groves location and the latest incarnation in the MX District Downtown feature extensive wine lists guaranteed to satisfy any palate—and creative menus to boot. Wines are listed according to their Robust Factor, a user-friendly format based on the wine’s body style, to make choosing easier.

SASHA’S ON SHAW (4069 Shaw Ave., 314.771.7274) Walls full of vino and an eclectic menu are the hallmarks of this South City favorite. The charming patio is a see-and-be-seen spot without the pretention, especially come summertime.

ELAIA & OLIO (1634 Tower Grove Ave., 314.932.1088) This co-located wine bar and fine dining destination not only has a first-rate selection of wines, but it also boasts a world-class beverage staff, headed by Beverage Director Andrey Ivanov and Assistant Beverage Director Brandon Kerne, both award-winning sommeliers in their own right.

THE WINE & CHEESE PLACE (multiple locations, wineandcheeseplace.com) With four area locations and an extensive online catalog, this local chain is the place to go for all of your vino needs. The stores host frequent tastings, as well as classes. There’s also plenty of product and programs to be had for beer and spirits fans.

ANNIE GUNN’S (16806 Chesterfield Airport Road, 636.532.7684) The wine program, helmed by local legend Glenn Bardgett, features some 700 selections. Chef Lou Rook’s locally focused fare provides incomparable pairing opportunities.

CHAUMETTE WINERY & VINEYARDS (24345 State Route WW, Ste. Genevieve, 573.747.1000) This award-winning winery has a diverse offering of wines, from dry whites to ports, that challenge the notion of Missouri wines being “second-tier.” Head out to Ste. Genevieve to taste at the source, or find them at top area restaurants like Niche and Elaia & Olio.

WINES UNDER \$40



1 BIN 36 SYRAH A quality and reasonably priced red, it’s full-bodied with plenty of plum and berries, and will stand up nicely to a grilled tenderloin. Find it at Sasha’s on Shaw (\$29/bottle).



2 2006 DE MOLINA This red blend is great if purse strings are tight. A blend of syrah, carmenere and cabernet, it’s a good match for roasted pork loin. Find it at Robust (\$36/bottle).



3 2011 AURELIA VISINESCU ANIMA LATE HARVEST CHARDONNAY A good low-buck bet, this creamy, full-bodied wine with hints of fruit goes well with dishes like cauliflower tahini and Cornish game hen. Find it at Elaia & Olio (\$40/bottle).

WINES UNDER \$100



4 2004 BODEGAS ONTANON RIOJA RESERVA The deep, succulent fruits present make an especially fine accompaniment for an order of lamb rotisserie. Find it at Elaia & Olio, (\$45/bottle).



5 LAIRD FAMILY COLD CREEK RANCH CHARDONNAY Rich with plenty of fruit and a hint of minerality, this vino hits the mark mid-way. It’s great with mild cheeses, seafood and tropical fruits. Find it at Sasha’s on Shaw (\$59/bottle).



6 2011 GRATIOT-PILLIÈRE TRADITION CHAMPAGNE Nothing denotes good times like a glass of Champagne. This fine selection is a good choice if things are looking up, and perfect with an order of crab cakes. Find it at Robust (\$91/bottle).

WINES UNDER \$160



7 2009 ROBERT WEIL GRAFENBERG TROCKEN This bone-dry German riesling is perfect for those with deep pockets and a taste for octopus salad, pickled herring and Bay scallop ceviche. Find it at Elaia & Olio (\$139/bottle).



8 2008 AGRICOLA QUERCIBELLA BATAR An Italian blend of pinot blanc and chardonnay, it’s just the thing when money is no object. With lots of apple, lightly oaked and a nice long finish, it’s perfect with crab avocado salad. Find it at Sasha’s on Shaw (\$149).



9 2010 GAJA CA’ MARCANDA This splurge-worthy bottle is it if the sky’s the limit. This bright Tuscan blend of merlot, syrah and Sangiovese pairs nicely with a bistro strip steak. Find it at Robust (\$154/bottle).



Sasha’s on Shaw

➔ 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK THE SOMMELIER

The next time you’re out and about and getting ready to order some wine, take advantage of your sommelier’s expertise before making your selection.

1/ Is there anything new in stock that’s not yet on the wine list? Sometimes it takes a while for new bottles to make it onto the menu, but they’re sitting in the cellar and available for you to discover.

2/ Tell your sommelier what you usually enjoy drinking and ask for suggestions from the menu that would be a close match.

3/ What offerings are you particularly excited about? A sommelier’s greatest passion is vino, so take advantage.

4/ Is there something on the list that can’t be purchased retail and is only available at the restaurant? There are lots of great wines out there that never make it to the store shelves.

5/ Ask for details about the style you’re interested in—don’t assume every chardonnay is going yield the same flavors, for example.



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WARM-WEATHER BREWS

Beat the heat with these summertime selections.

1/ 4 HANDS SINGLE SPEED SESSION

This refreshing American blonde ale is brewed with elderflower, red wheat and several different hops varieties, making for some really aromatic floral notes. The brewery touts the selection as a fine companion to poultry dishes and camembert cheese.

2/ URBAN CHESTNUT SPRING SAMPLER PACK

Owner/brewmaster Florian Kuplent has released a four-pack of his favorite springtime beers, which includes Zwickel (pictured here), a Bavarian-style unfiltered lager; Winged Nut, an ale with notes of chestnuts; Hopfen, a Bavarian-style IPA; and Pierre's Wit, a Belgian-style wheat beer. Owner/Brewmaster Florian Kuplent tells us that the Pierre's Wit is a fine match for a light summer salad.

3/ PERENNIAL SAISON DE LIS

This Belgian-style Saison is brewed with chamomile flowers and is available year-round, but its light character makes it especially good for drinking in the spring and summer months. It pairs well with light salads and seafood, from salmon to shellfish.

4/ SCHLAFLY SUMMER LAGER

This summer seasonal is available in bottles, as well as cans for float trip fans and festival-goers. Andy White, general manager of the Tap Room, suggests trying it alongside grilled burgers and brats, tomato and watermelon salads, fresh summer fruits and other picnic fare.

5/ SQUARE ONE BAVARIAN WEIZEN

A traditional German wheat beer, this offering from Square One is a good match for sausages

and Companion pretzels, both of which are available on the Square One menu. Brewmaster John Witte says it's also a good choice for cheeses.

6/ THE CIVIL LIFE ENGLISH PALE ALE

This bright, punchy brew has a refreshing crispness, and since it's a "session" beer, it has a lower alcohol content so it can be imbibed in greater quantities. Try it with the warm Companion pretzels or the grilled cheese sandwich of the day at The Civil Life tasting room.

7/ O'FALLON KITE TAIL

This soft and delicate seasonal beer has notes of tropical fruits and subtle citrus. It pairs nicely with lighter fare like fruit salads, chicken and mild fish. It can even be quaffed at dessert with a fruit sorbet.



The Civil Life Brewing Co.

TOP TAP HOUSES »

INTERNATIONAL TAP HOUSE (multiple locations, internationaltaphouse.com) iTAP is the destination for the serious beer drinker, with digs in Chesterfield and Soulard and a third coming to the CWE. Each spot has around 40 rotating brews on tap and 400-plus international selections in the cooler, with an atmosphere that's comfortable without any pretense.

CICERO'S (6691 Delmar Blvd., 314.862.0009) This U City watering hole has 50-odd taps serving up a wide variety of local, national and international brews that rotates frequently (a fresh beer list is published weekly), along with easily twice that many by the bottle. It also plays host to a popular beer school.

THE CIVIL LIFE BREWING CO. (3714 Holt Ave., thecivillifebrewingcompany.com) This South City favorite has a communal table similar to a German beer hall. In addition to the tasty brews, patrons can enjoy a friendly board game, or a good old fashioned gentleman's debate with one of the trusty bartenders.

PERENNIAL ARTISAN ALES (8125 Michigan Ave., 314.631.7300, perennialbeer.com) Perennial has a spacious patio area for summertime drinking pleasure. With beers ranging from a rye barrel-aged Mexican Chocolate Stout to a wild yeast fermented Saison aged on Missouri wine grapes in French oak wine barrels, you're sure to find something completely unique.

URBAN CHESTNUT BREWING COMPANY (3229 Washington Ave., 314.533.4900) Housed in a renovated Midtown garage, UCBC just expanded its space last year to include a covered outdoor biergarden, featuring entertainment by local musicians throughout the summer.

4 HANDS BREWING COMPANY (1220 S. 8th St., 314.436.1555) With plenty of seating indoors and out, 4Hands also features live music and food courtesy of the folks at Baileys' Range. Stop in for 4 Hands' regular Monday night \$1 off pints, Tuesday Neighborhood Nights and Cellar Nights (where patrons bring beer to share) on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month. Live music on the weekends.

SQUARE ONE BREWERY & DISTILLERY (1727 Park Ave., 314.231.2537) This Lafayette Square fixture features a full kitchen and an inviting pub feel. Be sure to check out the guided tour of the brewery and distillery on the first Saturday of the month, starting at 11am. Call to reserve your spot.

SCHLAFLY TAP ROOM (2100 Locust St., 314.241.2337) and **SCHLAFLY BOTTLEWORKS** (7260 Southwest Ave., 314.241.2337) The Tap Room boasts a classic public house vibe while Bottleworks tends toward a traditional restaurant experience, with the addition of a charming beer garden.

BEER SPEAK

Ale: Beer fermented with top-fermenting yeast, typically at warmer temperatures and for a shorter period of time than lagers. Ales can yield a range of complex aromatics, from hay and grass to a variety of fruits and flowers.

Lager: Beer fermented with bottom-fermenting yeasts at cooler temps. Lagers are often lighter and crisper than ales.

Hops: This flower is introduced at different points in the brewing cycle to produce bitterness, aroma and flavor in the finished beer.

Malt: Processed barley that has germinated and then is dried and added to hot water in a process known as mashing.

Wort: The liquid that results from the mashing process.

Yeast: Added to the wort, yeast converts the sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide during fermentation.