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Last Updated: 5:18 am | Tuesday, February 26, 2008

Wine bar takes root

BY STEFFANIE ROMINE | [SRROMINE@ENQUIRER.COM](mailto:SRROMINE@ENQUIRER.COM)

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**OVER-THE-RHINE** - Before the advent of in-home washers and dryers, Laundromats were a place to socialize. Lavomatic Café, a wine bar and restaurant opening today at 1211 Vine St., will serve a similar purpose for the up-and-coming Gateway Quarter.

"People who didn't have laundry facilities at home; that's where they went to meet people living in the neighborhood," said chef Jean-Robert de Cavel, a partner in the restaurant. "That's what we wanted here. We wanted a place for people in the neighborhood to come."

Lavomatic, touted as an urban French wine bar, draws on its history - the building is believed to have housed a Laundromat, and "Lavomatic" is a French word for Laundromat.

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But the wine bar and bistro focuses on the future, too, said chef Joanne Drilling. The floors and tables are bamboo, and the bar is made of cork - a nod to sustainability and to vino. The table bases were recycled from Grammer's bar and restaurant, which Martin Wade, de Cavel's partner, now owns. Ductwork and exposed brick give the narrow, bright restaurant an urban feel, and a rooftop dining area - which will open by April - offers an urban oasis in the intimate, 80-seat restaurant.

Some décor came from neighboring shops, including Metronation, the furniture and gift store that is adjoined to Lavomatic.

And the food - "rustic, full-flavored French fare," Drilling said - will be local whenever possible.

Buffalo, rabbit and chicken are all farmed nearby, with plenty of ingredients coming from Findlay Market. Christian Moerlein brews will be served and used in some dishes, and Madison's gelato and sorbets will compliment desserts by pastry chef Marni Ward.

"We're really committed to trying to be green as much as possible," said Drilling.

"I really wanted us to have a down-to-earth feel to the food and to the wine," she added. "(Our customers) are people who love food, people who love wine. I want, and Burke (Morton, Lavomatic's manager and sommelier) wants, for people to come here and feel comfortable."

Two entrées and two glasses of wine are expected to run about \$50, said Morton.

Morton, the sommelier at Jean-Robert at Pigall's until last weekend, said about 25 to 28 wines will be available by the glass for \$6-\$12, with 75 wines by the bottle. Bottles of wine will sell for about \$10 above retail, he said, a lower price point than at many restaurants.

"Ultimately, we want to make it easy for people to try good wines, to learn about wines," said Morton. "While it's a magical drink, it's just a drink, so I want people to feel like it's just that."

Drilling - who worked with de Cavel at the Maisonette and at Jean-Robert at Pigall's - added: "We would really like to be a part of the community here. Burke and I have really made a point to meet the people in the neighborhoods, and they will be a large part of the regular customers."

De Cavel said that the wine bar will welcome single diners from the newly renovated condos and apartments in the Gateway Quarter.

"It must be like the SoHo of the late '60s early '70s in New York City," de Cavel said of Over-the-Rhine. "Every month this area changes, a new store opens, bringing more people."



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Burke Morton (left) is the manager, Joanne Drilling is chef de cuisine and Jean-Robert de Cavel is one of the partners of the Lavomatic Café that opens today in the Gateway Quarter of Over-the-Rhine.

If you go to the Lavomatic Café

**Address:** 1211 Vine St. in Over-the-Rhine

**Phone:** 513-621-1999

**Hours:** Opens at 11:30 a.m. for lunch Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. for brunch Saturday and Sunday; kitchen closes at 9:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The kitchen will also serve a limited late-night menu.



Joanne Drilling goes over a last minute checklist with line cook

Wade agreed, and he praised the rapid redevelopment in the area: "By opening up this, it gives credibility to this part of our community."

Wade and de Cavel, along with Annette Pfund-de Cavel and Marilyn Wade, own also own Jean-Robert at Pigall's, Twist Lounge at Pigall's and JeanRo Bistro in downtown Cincinnati, and Greenup Café and Chalk Food + Wine in Covington.

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JOANNE DILLING goes over a fast-foodie checklist with the owner Meredith Molli (left) in the Lavomatic Café's kitchen before opening its doors to friends and family Monday.

#### Grammer's ready to open Thursday

Grammer's, the historic German restaurant in Over-the-Rhine, will reopen Thursday as a bar, said owner Martin Wade.

He and his wife, Marilyn Wade, bought the building at Walnut and Liberty streets from former Cincinnati Vice Mayor Jim Tarbell in September.

"We decided three months ago to reopen Grammer's and see if we could help jump-start this part of the world," Wade said.

Grammer's, which has been open only for private functions since 1992, will be open Tuesday through Saturday from 4 p.m. until midnight or 1 a.m., said Wade.

"It's an institution," Wade said of the 19th-century building. "It's like when we reopened (what is now Jean-Robert at) Pigall's."

The menu will be limited at first, Wade said, with bratwurst, mettwurst and soft pretzels.

Wade has hired Ryan Breen, formerly of Greenup Café in Covington, and Lois Parker, formerly of Coach and Four restaurant, to manage Grammer's.

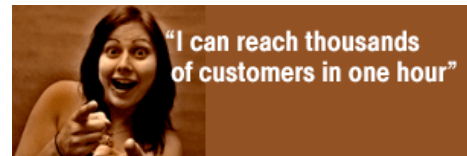
Wade now owns more than a dozen other parcels between 14th and Liberty streets on Walnut and Clay streets.

Information: 513-421-8300

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