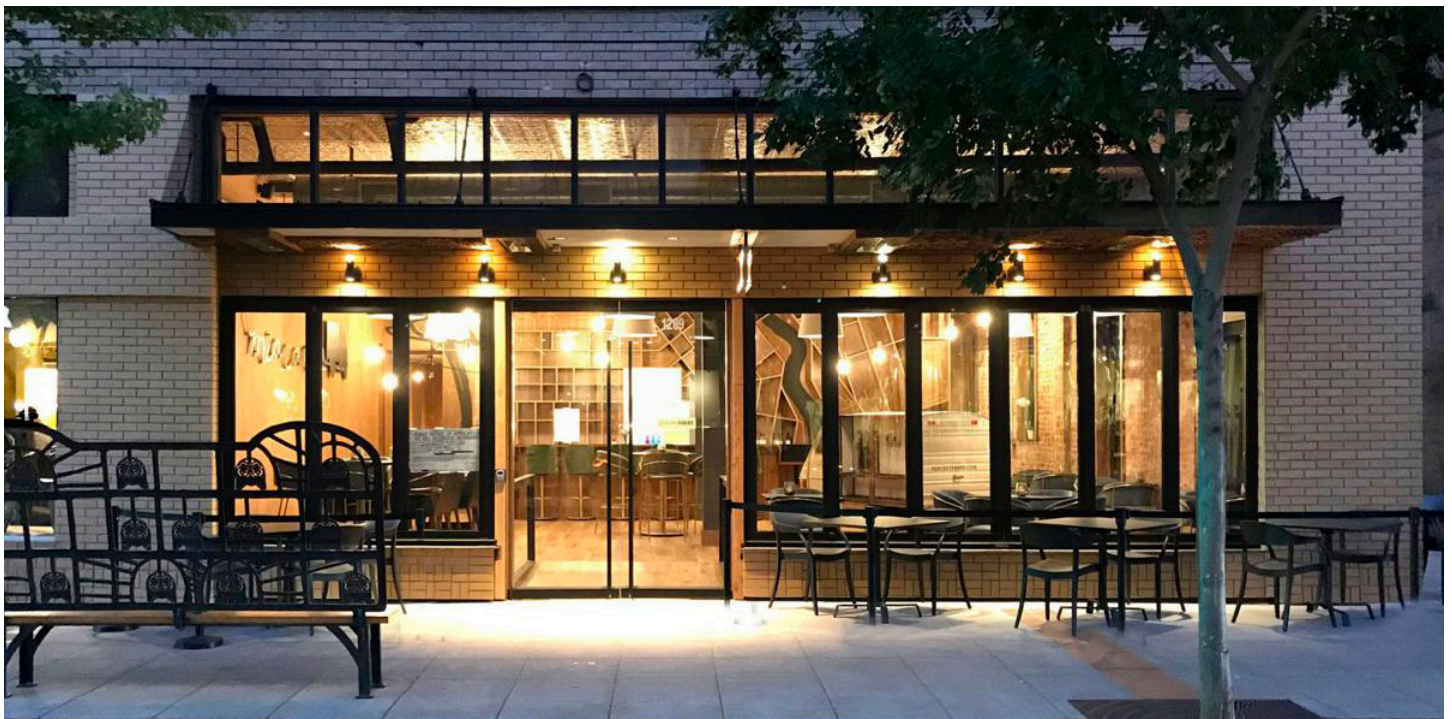


Mia Carta opens in downtown Napa: Six family-owned wineries form a collective tasting room

By CRAIG SMITH



The facade of the new Mia Carta tasting room in Napa.

Like good wines, the idea for Mia Carta, a tasting room collective of six, family-owned and operated micro-production Napa Valley wineries, developed over time. A long time, actually.

“We started coming to Napa for the wine 18 years ago,” said Shaun Mesher of him and his wife Stephanie. “Initially, we started with the big, commercial guys, then gravitated to the smaller wineries.”

Mesher liked the relaxed atmosphere and talking to people in more intimate settings. “I love all the cool stories about people and wine. The stories may be the best part of wine drinking. I want to sit on my couch, drink and hear stories.”

At the last comment, Stephanie and fellow partner Kim Bogner began to laugh. “Your couch is coming, promise!”

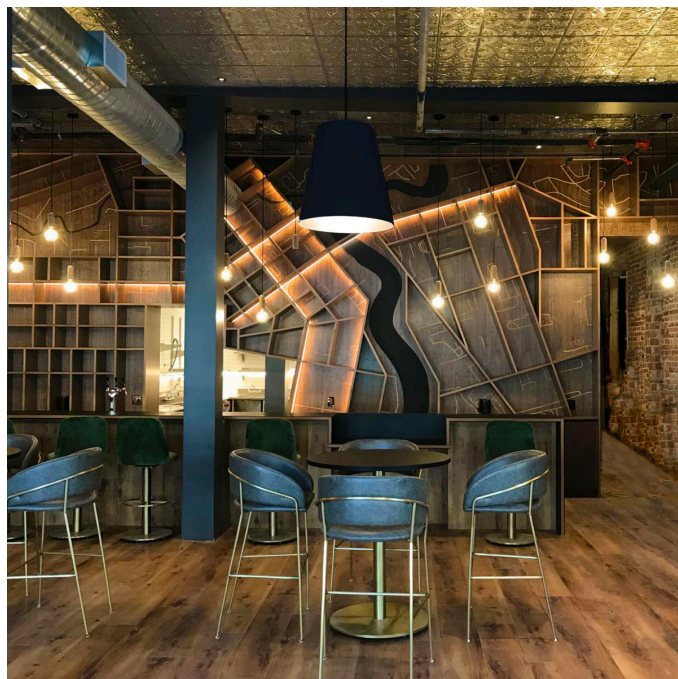
The room had its grand opening on June 17, and some pieces are still coming together, including that couch. It's hard to imagine that anything is "missing" – the room has an inviting, relaxed, unpretentious feel and look. This is a space where people can enjoy wine. And, again like a good wine, it will only get better.

Essere's portfolio of ultra-premium wines is sourced from sustainable estate vineyards in Napa's Oak Knoll, Yountville, and Coombsville AVA's. Shaun took the idea of purchasing the winery back to his friends in Canada, and the future of Essere was set into motion.

The concept for Mia Carta began to gel when the founder of Essere, Frank D'Ambrosio, a veteran Napa grape grower and vineyard owner, casually mentioned to Shaun Mesher, a long-time club member, his plans to sell the Essere wine label and assets.

Essere's portfolio of ultra-premium wines is sourced from sustainable estate vineyards in Napa's Oak Knoll, Yountville, and Coombsville AVA's. Shaun took the idea of purchasing the winery back to his friends in Canada, and the future of Essere was set into motion.

As a result, a dynamic collective of friends, with backgrounds in business, science, engineering and marketing, purchased the boutique Napa Valley label from Frank in 2017, and have been running it ever since.



The bar at Mia Carta, where six family-owned wineries will be pouring tastings in Napa.

Shaun, a chemist, was later in Napa enjoying wine and conversation with Sharon Harris of RARECAT wines. The science of wine fascinates Shaun, and both Sharon and Shaun are passionate about the art of taste.

He mentioned that he was considering opening a tasting room, and Sharon said she was also considering something similar. She also said that Ilsley Wines and Redmon Wines might be interested, but that both would insist on talking to Shaun to see if their philosophies were in line. They did, and it was a perfect fit.

Art House Wines and Sciandri Family Vineyards later joined the mix, and everything was set. Except, that is, for a location.

After looking at and rejecting a few locations, the partners found their space, which is part of the Native Sons Building. The Sons were already negotiating with a couple of other prospective tenants when Shaun met them.

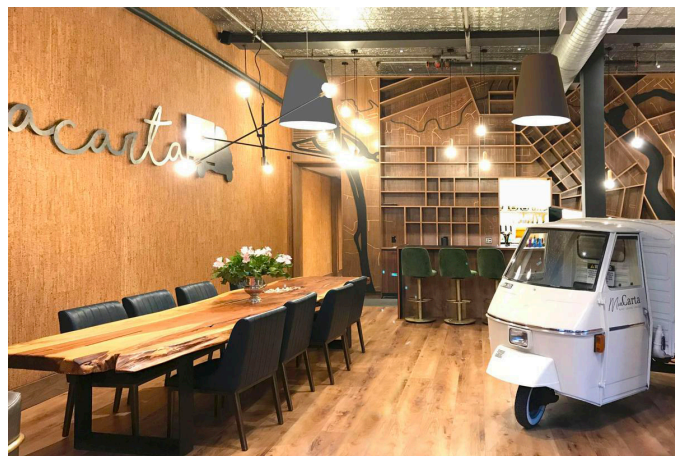
“The building had bones, but it was a mess,” he said. “It had been earthquake retrofitted, but there were five layers of 2-by-4s and drywall on the walls, the floors needed leveling, the front of the building needed to be bumped out, and the exterior needed a complete overhaul.”

Shaun could see the potential, and made the Sons the proverbial offer they couldn’t refuse. “I offered to bring it back to its original state.”

There were challenges in store, like removing a safe with 13-inch thick concrete walls, that had been built into the building during its original construction. It took 26 months from the signing of the lease to open the doors.

The features of the room unfold to the senses the longer you’re there. The back wall is a custom two-story, three-dimensional CNC-milled walnut wall map of the city of Napa. The tasting bar is crafted from 100% recycled paper. A vintage Piaggio “Ape del Vino”, which has been converted to a mobile tasting room for weddings or other events, is on display.

The 15-foot stamped metal ceilings, with acoustic tiles fitted behind it, keeps reverberation and echoes at bay. The east wall is sustainably produced, floor-to-ceiling cork, while the opposing wall is exposed, preserved brick, original to the 1914 structure.



An interior shot of the new Mia Carta tasting room.

Mia Carta has a private tasting room, a folding glass façade onto First Street which allows for open-air capabilities, and outdoor covered street dining with built-in heat lamps.

The respective owners of the partnering wineries are all committed to spending time at Mia Carta. For guests who, like Shaun, enjoy talking about wine almost as much as drinking it, that will make the experience at Mia Carta unique.

“The six wineries currently supporting us represent a good mix of Napa Valley wines, and we want to preserve that,” said Stephanie. “We’ve had other producers calling us, hoping to join us, and we are open to that.”

Mia Carta is currently open Thursday through Monday. Stop by some time. Who knows? You might be able to sit on that couch with Shaun and enjoy a glass of good wine and conversation.

Mia Carta is at 1209 First St., Napa. For more information, call 707-346-2244 or visit www.miacartanapa.com.