

HUSH, HUSH AT WINK'S BAR; VOICES CARRY
MOIRA MULDOON

Publication Date: October 27, 2005 Page: 14 Section: XL Ent Edition: Final

Generally speaking, I don't like sitting at the bar. The bartender is within earshot, and, well, a glass or two of wine and I get chatty.

If I'm by myself, sitting at the bar can be fun because people, bartenders included, talk to me. But with friends, I tend to prefer more quiet corners so our conversations are private. Not only do I have no desire for the bartender to figure out that I am in his establishment to write a column, I also don't want him to know about the details of the sleepover 40-hour party -- replete with Slip 'N Sliding action, tequilas and possibly squirt guns -- another friend decided we should throw at my house. (Instead I like to talk about the party in a newspaper column.)

But my friends were having none of my preference for discretion at Wink's new wine bar, open only since February. Over glasses of 2002 Nalle zinfandel, 2002 Trimbach Gewurztraminer and 2004 Venturini corvina blend, among others, we chatted freely. And because it was a Monday and we comprised four of the seven total patrons (Wink's bar has been delightfully quiet the three times I've stopped in -- all weeknights), our voices carried. Oh well. At least we talked about poetry as well as Slip 'N Slide tequila fests -- the one nonwriter in our group suggesting that everyone read his favorite poem aloud at some point during the 40 hours.

It's not hard for voices to carry from one person to the next at Wink's wine bar. Like the restaurant, it's an intimate space, with seating for only a few. One long tall table seats about 10; a single banquette covered in soft easily cleanable vinyl runs beneath a mirrored wall and can host about a dozen more, and the bar has room for eight people to sit and profess their plans to the world. All told, about 35 people fit comfortably. The wine list, as you might imagine from the reputation of the restaurant next door, is sterling. Among my favorites is an Australian sparkling wine called Cockatoo, but many others abound and they're labeled welcomingly: "Rich, ripe & substantial whites" for example, or "Pretty & pink" and "Big, bold & brazen reds." The wine list encourages rather than intimidates and changes as the wine-istas who run the show find new things to love. At any given point, about 40 to 50 wines are available by the glass; they can be sipped in 2-ounce tastes or a regular 6-ounce pour. Or by the bottle, of course. You can order food from the ever-changing restaurant menu, and a bar menu includes items such as a cheese plate or a ramekin of almonds.

As I was writing this column, I took a break to read "Heat Lightning," by Robert Penn Warren -- one of my friend's favorite poems. It's about a remembered affair, and the sexuality is wild, deep and articulated in 20 couplets and a single line at the end:

"The rose-flush beyond the black peaks, and think how far,
Far away, down what deep valley, scree, scar,
The thunder, redoubled, redoubling, rolls. Here silence."

I had a strange moment of identification with Mr. Penn Warren, not because I've had an

affair or have his skill with couplets, but because there are things you say only to one or two other people, confidences and foolishnesses about love or Slip 'N Slides no one else should hear, except those intimates. Or perhaps a reader.

bargirl@covad.net