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## Vinology: Persevering in a tough market

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by **Debra Jett**

The Jonna family aren't quitters; many would consider the extended family's businesses (Merchant's Fine Wines, Plum Market, Volo Wine Bars and the former Merchant of Volo) to qualify them as southeast Michigan's first family of wine.

So when their Vinology wine bar in Ann Arbor wasn't working right, instead of throwing in the towel they went back to the drawing board. They are committed to their concept and are willing to keep trying different models until they get it right. That kind of perseverance is an admirable trait.

Vinology is owned by the father-daughter team of John and Kristen Jonna and is one of two wine bars owned by this dynamic duo. The other wine bar, Vinoteca, is located in Royal Oak.

Recently John and Kristen Jonna invited the media to sample the summer menu and preview the Summer Wine Tasting series. The focus is now geared to wine and food pairings. And although the structure of the wine menu has remained the same, they continue to listen to customer requests and incorporate and make changes as demands dictate.

John Jonna played host and master of ceremonies. He explained the concept for the wine bar as seeking to make drinking wine an accessible, easily enjoyable experience, and thus, making wine more approachable to their customers.

I asked John if the Ann Arbor market was different compared to their customer-base at their other wine bar location in Royal Oak and also, just in general. He indicated that, 'yes, the Ann Arbor crowd is very different; first it is an intellectual and very cultural community and with that the crowd tends to analyze everything including the wine they drink. His philosophy is (and I am paraphrasing), if you like the wine, drink it and enjoy it for what it is.'

Other differences were that Ann Arborites tend to 'drink wine for everyday consumption' with their meals whereas in market places such as 'West Bloomfield the customers are more apt to cellar their wine'.

Since originally opening 3 years ago Vinology has gone through several incarnations and most notably the wine list. It is now compiled in a more sophisticated manner. Originally it was in booklet form and organized with tabulated taste definition icons to select the wine. I never really liked this approach because, to me, it seemed to be dumbing down the wine itself. I enjoy conferring with a sommelier or waitstaff for insight into a wine. Kristen explained that this format was developed by herself and former wine director, Paul Hanna, in an effort to bring wines down to earth especially for wine neophytes and a great deal of thought went into the formation of the taste definition concept.