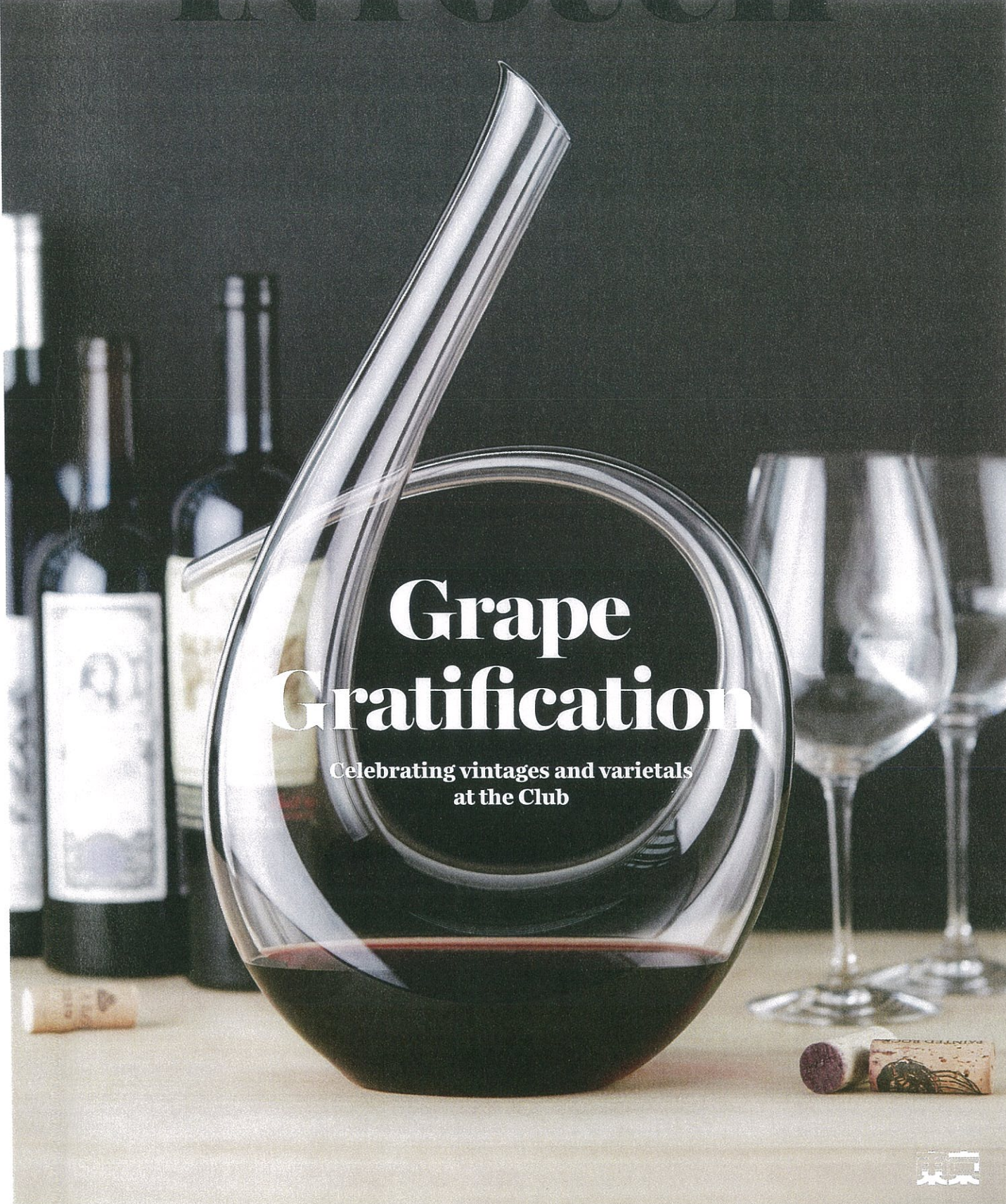


TOKYO AMERICAN CLUB

SEPTEMBER 2018

# INTOUCH



## Grape Gratification

Celebrating vintages and varietals  
at the Club



READING THE HERMIT KINGDOM + URBAN DESIGN + OWNING THE PODIUM



# *Uncorking Good Times*

YUUKI IDE

A blurred background image showing a wine glass and a cork. The glass is partially filled with a light-colored liquid, and the cork is lying on a surface in the foreground. The overall scene is softly lit, creating a warm and elegant atmosphere.

## With the Club set to host another Seasonal Wine Taste-Off this month, *INTOUCH* looks at how wine is bringing Members together.

WORDS KATHRYN WORTLEY

**L**ike the many fine bottles in its collection, the Club's wine program is improving with age. What began as a niche offering for diners decades ago is now a professional service that encapsulates restaurant wine lists, winemaker dinners and tastings, sommelier guidance, online and in-store offers and wine education.

The program has earned the Club a well-deserved reputation as a wine hub in Tokyo, and it has even helped attract new, grape-loving Members.

In 2017, for the third consecutive year, internationally acclaimed magazine *The World of Fine Wine* awarded CHOP Steakhouse's wine selection three stars—its highest rating—and a best medium-size wine list in Asia mention.

The wine list was evaluated on its range of producers, regions, styles and formats, as well as presentation and originality. Judges praised its design, diversity and descriptions, complimenting the "intelligent choices from Europe and the rest of the world."

Meanwhile, American Bar & Grill scooped one star in the short wine list section. Both awards are significant achievements for the fact that only another five lists in Japan were recognized by the prestigious British publication, which will announce 2018's winners this month.

"There is a phenomenal list here," says Sera Goto, the Club's wine program director, of the Club collection. "A casual dining list can be more difficult to construct than a premium list. Rather than load it with expensive or famous brand wines, price has to be taken into account. At that level, very subtle differences come into play. Curation of a wine list is almost like a science."

With a master's degree in winemaking and viticulture from the University of Bordeaux, coupled with know-how gleaned from time in the vineyards of Napa Valley, Goto embraces the challenge. Leading a team of five, she strives to improve the Club wine collection, an endeavor that was officially launched 15 years ago.



## Favored Flavors

“Whenever we see a vintage that is popular with Members or a wine that could be worthy of the program, that’s the driving force [to consider it for selection]. We look for famous labels, as well as those that aren’t well-known but are recognized by our sommeliers for their high quality,” Goto explains.

In a country that is experiencing a blossoming wine culture (the market is expected to grow annually by 2.5 percent over the coming years), the Club offers access to many hard-to-find wines. According to Goto, some importers use the Club to test the wider market’s appetite for particular wines.

The result is a collection of some 7,500 wines (more than a third of which hail from California), stored in floor-to-ceiling, state-of-the-art cellars in CHOP Steakhouse and American Bar & Grill, with many available through The Cellar and the Club website.

It is the wine team’s pursuit of excellence that inspired Member Terry White to join the Wine Committee and, last year, take the helm as chair.

“The Club has an incredible wine program and the wine team needs

### CHOP Steakhouse’s most popular wines in 2018.

- ▶ Jean Marie Bando La Séduisante Brut Tradition, Champagne, France (*sparkling*)
- ▶ 2015 Jordan Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, California (*white*)
- ▶ 2015 Caymus Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California (*red*)

### American Bar & Grill’s most popular wines in 2018.

- ▶ 2015 Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs, North Coast, California (*sparkling*)
- ▶ 2016 Beringer Chardonnay, Napa Valley, California (*white*)
- ▶ 2016 Textbook Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, California (*red*)

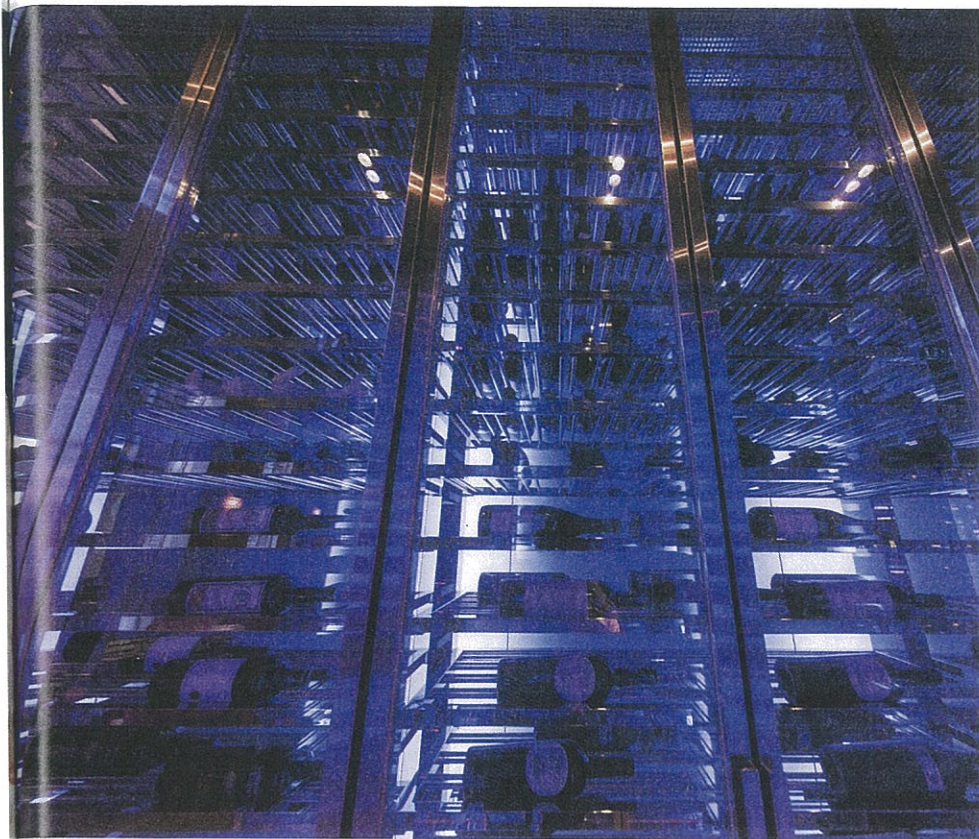
support and feedback from the membership,” he says. “Wine is part of the fabric of the Club.”

White’s priority is to broaden the wine program’s appeal by attracting both casual imbibers and oenophiles to wine-oriented social events and evenings of fun and fellowship.

“Rather than being a group with a common interest, the Wine Committee wants to become a group that shares its passion with the broader membership. And I think we’ve done that [so far],” he says.

The Wine Committee’s first step was to give Members the opportunity to choose the Club’s seasonal red and white wines at a tasting of more than 20 wines last November. The third installment of this successful event takes place on September 25.

Another new event format that has proven popular is a casual tasting in CHOP that pairs wine with the likes of cheese and chocolate. Naturally, the Club has continued to host dinners with winemakers from some of the world’s best wine regions, offering Members the perfect environment in which to learn and mingle while enjoying an impressive array of wines.



For those Members looking to deepen their vinicultural knowledge, the Club is set to run a second Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) course for Members. This globally recognized wine education program is divided into different levels.

Though there is a lot of interest in the WSET certification among Members, Goto says most Members see wine as a way to unwind and socialize. And the wine program's newest venture is designed to facilitate that.

Named after the first stage of winemaking, Crush is a temporary wine bar within American Bar & Grill on weekday evenings in September, October and November. Members will be able to enjoy unique wines by the glass and small bites, with a sommelier on hand to advise on pairings.

For White, it's a welcome reminder of the laid-back evenings he and fellow Members enjoyed in Vineyards, the much-loved wine bar in the Club's former Azabudai facility. He hopes that Crush, too, will be able to replicate that inviting atmosphere in which Members enjoyed wine while mingling and meeting new people.

"Part of our job is to break down barriers to enjoying wine," says White of the Wine Committee's role. "Wine shouldn't be an intimidating thing. We're all novices. No one should think that the barrier is too high. It's so low that you couldn't limbo under it."

Over the coming months, White says Members can expect to see more Club tastings and themed wine events designed to satisfy varying levels of knowledge, enthusiasm, palate and budget.

Members Tom and Chika Nevins will, no doubt, attend some of those. As fans of the regular wine dinners, the monthly First Friday events and Rooftop Mondays, they say chatting and making new friends are as important as enjoying old favorites and new tipples.

"The best way to know [about wine]," says Chika, "is to taste it."

Kathryn Wortley is a Tokyo-based freelance journalist.

#### CRUSH WINE BAR

› Weekdays › 4–7pm › American Bar & Grill

#### SEASONAL WINE TASTE-OFF

› September 25 › 6–8:30pm › ¥1,500  
› Details online



## Licensed to Pour

WORDS KATHRYN WORTLEY  
IMAGE ENRIQUE BALDUCCI

Highly qualified wine experts are the backbone of the Club's wine program.

More than 25 restaurant staff have been certified by the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET). The highly regarded, London-based organization runs courses on wine, spirits and sake for industry professionals and enthusiasts.

The levels run from the introductory Level 1 to the Level 4 diploma. There is also a Master of Wine qualification, but fewer than 400 people have passed the exam since 1953.

Last month, chief sommelier Kanako Ijichi received her Level 3 certificate and a further six staff passed Level 2, including Yo Goto, a server in Rainbow Café and Café Med.

"I have already gotten closer with some of the wine lovers by chatting about a common interest," he says. "We are lucky to have a wide range of quality wines at the Club, so I just help Members [appreciate] them."

PHOTO (L-R): KAORI YOSHIDA, KANAKO IJICHI AND JAMES JOHNSON